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HURST AND HANGER

VOL. III.

John Pennier.

HURST AND HANGER

A HISTORY IN TWO PARTS

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, & CO., 1 PATERNOSTER SQUARE

1886

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HURST AND HANGER.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THREE weeks from that time a lively arrival might have been seen at the door of Hurst Grange. A message had been received in Grosvenor Street that those who wanted to make hay while the sun shone must appear without fail on the following Saturday; and on Saturday, at midday, the large brake sent from the Hanger to convey the whole party drew up before the ivied porch of Hurst, well filled with happy faces, old and young. In the shadow of the porch, waiting to welcome them, stood the Vicar and Dora, while Harold strolled slowly forward from the shade of the neighbouring trees to open the carriage door, followed by Miss Waller, Sir Philip, and Angus Campbell, who had already arrived, the two first from their respective homes, the other from his morning's interview with Mr. Brown.

‘The complete haymaker, indeed,’ observed Harold, as, after lifting down various broad-hatted, brown-pinafores little creatures, he held out his hand to Effie, whose costume was but a daintier edition of the same. ‘Got up with a strict attention to business, I perceive.’

Effie sprang lightly down with a face of delight. ‘Of course we are,’ she cried. ‘We have come to be useful! Papa has been laughing at us all the way; he says we look just fit to be hired out, rakes and all—see!’ for Thomas, the footman, was descending from the box with a large number of wooden weapons in his arms, round which the children were already assembling like a cluster of bees.

‘Come in,’ cried the Vicar, ‘come in all of you out of the sun. Eat first and then you may work afterwards to your hearts’ content.’

‘You have got quickly over your own business, I see,’ said Sir Malcolm to his brother, who had been assisting his small namesake through the dangers of a private route of his own over the carriage wheel to the ground.

Mr. Campbell laughed. ‘Quickly! That is how idle men always talk. I have been closeted with Mr. Brown for three whole hours, and very long, hot hours they were. I have not even been here long enough to grow cool again.’

‘We shall all grow cool here,’ said Sir Malcolm, as they entered the shady dining-room, where many good things were already covering the table. ‘Is this the way you feed all your haymakers, Uncle John? Now, little ones, set to work and be off to the fields. Haymaking can’t be had every day in the year.’

The children needed little exhortation; they could scarcely give themselves time to eat in their eagerness for liberty and haycocks, and before their elders were ready to follow them they had rushed out to the irresistible garden, there to scamper in sun and shade, over lawn and flower-beds, until glimpses of a still more inviting paradise were caught through the old elms. Then every little pair of feet was to be seen tearing or toddling—according to its owner’s ability—down the paths that led to the meadows below, where waggons, and horses, and haymakers were in full employment. On rushed the children with cries of delight—little Angus first—to the smoothly-shorn, sweet-scented hayfield, there to begin their promised assistance by tumbling themselves all at once into the middle of several delicious cocks, which the old gardener and his troop had that morning built up with most particular care.

‘Hullo!’ said Harry, as, with Sir Malcolm and Effie, he followed the young rioters. ‘What will old Jerry say to “them mischievous chil-

dern"! His temper has never been warranted to stand trifles, especially at haymaking time.'

'Oh, let us put it right!' cried Effie, as she set off running like a child herself, capturing a large hayfork on her road, with which she was soon labouring conscientiously on one disordered cock, while Gussie was smothering his sisters in the next.

'My dear child, how hot you are making yourself!' said her father, as they came up to her. 'Put down that dreadful weapon, pray, before you have done yourself or anybody else a mischief.'

'Oh, but, papa, I came to be useful,' panted Effie, pausing for an instant in her toils, 'and women do work. Look at them all behind the waggon.'

'The waggon—we're going to ride on the waggon,' shouted several little voices, and the next moment Sir Malcolm was pursuing his son and heir in sudden alarm lest he should be found under the horses' feet, or seen falling from the waggon's side.

'In pity to our feelings lay aside your arms,' said Harold, as he took the fork from Effie's yielding grasp, 'or we shall be obliged to work in imitation, and my temper is like Jerry's, it won't stand haymaking.'

'Ah! how quickly you do it,' said Effie, piteously, as a few powerful tosses restored the

hay to its proper position, 'how much better than we can—but we can rake, I suppose.'

'Effie, Effie,' cried Di, as she came towards them with her youngest child in her hand, 'what can you have been about to make yourself so hot already?'

'Haymaking, mamma,' said Effie, humbly. 'That is what I came for, you know.'

Lady Campbell exclaimed, and began to forbid, when Harold immediately turned round and offered her his own pitchfork, with the assurance that all idlers were to be warned off the premises that afternoon, on which Di laughed, and led the lesser Di away.

'Let me recall Mr. Samuel Weller's judicious conduct towards his respected parent to your memory,' said Harold, as he presented his companion with a small rake, which he had fetched from a neighbouring hay row.

'What was that?' she inquired.

'When he wanted a thing he asked for it, and if he didn't get it he took it, for fear he should be led to do something wrong through not having it,' replied Harold, as he set to work at the next dilapidated cock, while Effie raked after him in meditative silence.

Other figures were now appearing on the scene—children from the neighbourhood with their mammas or nurses, who had been invited to meet the party from London, and the elders

soon established themselves in the shade, or assisted the children to build large nests of hay in which to play and smother each other to their hearts' content. In the midst of their games there was a shout of recognition from Gussie, and Dora, looking up, saw Charlie and a strange gentleman entering the field.

Involuntarily she turned away, and then turned back again, ashamed that she should, even for an instant, have fancied that it could ever be difficult to meet Charlie. She had now been at home nearly three weeks, during which time he had not once appeared—returning to London the very same day that she had herself come back to Hurst. She had resolved that, after his promise, he should be treated exactly as usual; she had felt sure he would appear this afternoon, and told him so with a smile of welcome before hearing, not without a little curiosity, the name of his companion, whom he introduced to her. This, then, was Mr. Grey,—the dreaded Mr. Grey, the man against whose appearance at Hurst she had so strenuously protested!

Harold had been as good as his word in the conversation that had passed between them some time ago; till that very morning she had not even heard Mr. Grey's name again, and when her brother had mentioned at breakfast-time that he was coming down to spend Sunday

with Charlie at the Hanger, and would preach for an absentee clergyman in Arnborough, it was in an indifferent manner, which, coupled with his total silence about him ever since their first conversation, at once suggested to her hopeful spirit that his original idea had been quietly abandoned. Under these circumstances she was able not only to welcome him with civility, and regard him with unprejudiced eyes, but even to remember that the part he had taken in the closing scene of poor Tom Barnes' life gave him a just claim on her interest and attention. There was nothing to justify dislike in Mr. Grey's pleasant countenance, and his pale cheeks and hard-working air reminded her that he was now a London clergyman, who probably well deserved a country holiday. An inquiry as to whether this were the first hayfield he had seen that year drew forth a confession that he had not quitted London for a single day since Christmas. Dora's pity, though sincere, was slight when compared to that of the Vicar, who now joined them.

'You don't say so!' was his horrified exclamation. 'Never set foot in the country the whole summer through! Good heavens! a man must be made of cast iron to stand such a life as that!'

Mr. Grey laughed as he answered: 'Many have to stand a great deal more than that. It

is nothing when you are used to the work ; but I could not resist Merivale's tempting offer that I should run down with him to-day.'

'Part of the temptation being that you are to do another man's work to-morrow ! Charlie might have spared you that, I think.'

But this also appeared to be 'nothing' in Mr. Grey's eyes. 'It is as easy as not to preach a sermon, if you haven't to write it,' he said, 'and I am glad to do anything your nephew asks me ; the balance is generally too much the other way.'

'How's that ?'

'Don't you know ? He comes once a week at least to help me in some of my parish work, and gives very substantial assistance besides.'

'I never heard a word of it.'

'He does it as if he were cut out for the work. I only wish I could induce him to give up the law, and come to us altogether.'

'Ah !' The Vicar's face changed. 'No, you won't do that—not that ; we can't have all we want in this world—any of us.'

'Very true. But I want him uncommonly I assure you.'

Dora would have liked to hear more, but the gentlemen were moving towards the party in the hay ; and, after a moment's reflection, she turned to attend to her elder guests seated beneath some of the old elms with which the meadows were

studded. Here a tea-table was presently spread, beside which she and Effie found full employment, as the amateur haymakers gathered round it one after another, or carried off cups of tea, and baskets of strawberries, to establish themselves at short distances in shady corners.

‘Those children will make themselves ill, I am certain,’ said Lady Campbell, who was comfortably seated in a low chair, her cup of tea in her hand, and several old acquaintances around. ‘Just go and see what they are about, Effie. Harold will never check them. Angus will be ill to-morrow, and Mysie too, if you don’t look after them.’

Effie moved rather slowly across the broad hot space which lay between the elms, where they were seated, and an old ash tree at some little distance under which Captain Vaughan and the little Darrells and Campbells were reclining.

‘Mamma is afraid the children may be having too much fruit,’ she said, doubtfully.

‘So they are—much too much. Leave off, you young cormorant—or there will be none for anybody else;’ and raising himself on his elbow, Harry rolled little Angus away from one basket of strawberries, while Effie, recommending prudence to the rest, carried off another, with which she returned to the tea-table. Her journeys, however, were not over.

‘Mysie’s handkerchief, I declare,’ said Di,

as she raised a little pink silk object from the ground, and tossed it towards her step-daughter. 'What a careless child it is! She will certainly catch cold if you don't make her put it on directly.'

Once more Effie retraced her steps, this time to find Harold extended on the ground with his eyes shut, while the children ran round him, feeding him with strawberries, while shouts of laughter prevented much from being heard, when the captured Mysie explained that Captain Vaughan was 'really' the giant that Jack killed, and the strawberries were 'really' the little children he ate up every day for his breakfast.

As others of the party besides the giant appeared to be still employed on the strawberries, Effie thought it advisable again to possess herself of a basket of fruit, which she was carefully carrying away, when Gussie, rushing after her, shouted aloud that she was to bring back the strawberries; Captain Vaughan wanted them himself—*directly*.

Bring them directly! No, indeed! Why was she to be his messenger? She turned in a different direction, and was walking away more hastily, when in another moment her name was called, and looking round, she saw Harold quickly following her.

'What did Gussie say?' he demanded. 'Anything about me?'

‘He said you wanted the strawberries, and that I—was to bring them back—directly.’

‘The little wretch! And you believed I had told him to say it?’

Effie was silent.

‘I was speaking to the children,’ he went on hurriedly. ‘I never knew you were there.’

‘Mamma had sent me back with Mysie’s silk handkerchief.’

‘Sent you back! Some people are cool hands!’ and Captain Vaughan darted an indignant glance towards the unconscious Di in her comfortable retreat by the tea-table. ‘And you thought I was going to do the same? How could you?’

‘I did not know.’

‘Surely you don’t believe because other people make you their slave that I would do the same, or that I think it right anybody should do it! You can’t believe that—or what must you think of me?’

Harold’s unusual discomposure had a contrary effect on his companion. Her calmness had returned, and there was the little touch of dignity in her face which never misbecame its gentleness, as she answered:

‘No; I might be sure you would not wish that. But I must ask you not to speak in that way about mamma. She does not make me a slave at all. It is my pleasure to be with the

children, and to do all I can for them, and it is not just to her. She is so very good to me —really.'

There was a 'dying fall' in the last word capable of revealing much to ears that were tuned to catch a soul's soft music. Harold's eyes rested earnestly on the speaker, and there were some silent moments before his answer came.

'I beg your pardon. I will not do it again.'

He turned away, and Effie pursued her own path with a lightened heart, in spite of its quickened beatings, as she reflected on her own audacity.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Past and Present wound in one
Do make a garland for the heart.

TENNYSON.

THE shadows were lengthening over the field, and the latest loads were slowly crossing its smoothly shorn surface, bearing on their tops hot and happy haymakers beneath the waving oak branches, which showed that the harvest was finished, when Lady Campbell rose at length to return to the house, and collect as soon as might be the scattered members of her little flock. They were to go on to the Hanger for a country Sunday, and various carriages were already waiting in front of the hall door to convey the guests of the afternoon to their different homes; but a visit must first be paid to the long stone barn, more than four centuries old, with narrow, arched, stone windows and high-pitched mossy roof, within which stretched a well-spread board, where the real labourers in the field were to be regaled that evening.

“Who, while he feasted all the rich, yet ne’er forgot the poor,” said Angus. ‘One, or both,

are always being royally entertained whenever I have the pleasure of finding myself here.'

He found that the day's hospitality was not over so far as regarded himself, and that his host considered it a settled thing he should dine with them before returning to London, the Hanger being too far off for such an arrangement. Harold was engaged to the Hanger, but if Mr. Campbell would honour himself and Dora with his company they would be delighted to entertain him, and he should be sent down to Arnborough to catch the latest train—all of which was readily accepted by Mr. Campbell excepting the last offer. He would much prefer walking; it would be delightful in the cool of the evening.

Delightful indeed all things looked and felt half an hour later, when he stood on the velvet sward outside the Grange porch. The guests had departed, the sun was beginning to sink in the west, the earliest rooks were already winging their way overhead to their leafy homes in the valley below. All Nature's hour of repose and refreshment was at hand. Stillness had settled on the old walls and the garden walks once more—the world had abandoned them—he was alone. How long was it since the busy London man had spent a leisure hour alone in so fair a scene, on such a lovely June evening? He could not have told. Visions of early boyish days, dreamy, indistinct emotions, seemed rising to his

mind, as in his slow walk up and down the soft lawn before the hall door he watched the gathering sunset glow, and heard the faint ‘caw, caw’ above his head. Presently remembrance stretched on to another time—nearer than boyhood, and yet long enough ago to have passed also into the region of half-forgotten visions, for how much lay between then and now! But the past rose up for a moment with strange distinctness, while he raised his eyes to the ivy-mantled porch as though expecting once more to find it white with hoarfrost, its old lamp still giving out a cheerful light in the darkness of a winter night. He turned, and entering the silent house, slowly crossed the hall, and, pushing open a half-closed door, looked dreamily around him. Yes, this had been the room they were led to—a room full of warmth and firelight—his first impression of Hurst Grange! The evening air was breathing through it now, sweet with the fragrance of the flower-beds without, stirring the muslin draperies of the windows, and touching the long ferns and grasses that drooped from clusters of roses and honeysuckle within. This was the hearth, now filled with foliage and flowers, round which they had gathered to listen for the New Year’s chimes. That was the oriel window where he had seen a girl’s form leaning as she gazed out upon the wintry sky. A lady’s writing-table stood in it now, and near it was an open

piano. Did she still sing? It seemed so, for there were songs among the music scattered over it, and on one leaf—how strange a chance!—stood the faint pencil words, ‘Dora Vaughan, Glenarchie,’ and a date of eight years back. He knew the song; he had sent for it, he had given it to her. And suddenly, as though it had been but yesterday, he saw before him evening lights falling across purple moors, a gipsy tea with the blue smoke curling away among the heather; he could hear the boys’ merry voices, the girls’ gay singing, and Donald in the background whistling to the dogs. How freshly the air was blowing across the moor, laden with scents from the heather and copses! They mixed themselves in his dreaming fancy with those in the room around him. Beside him, on the writing-table, amid books, pictures, and flowers, lay a little glove and a freshly gathered rose. He lifted the rose and placed it in his coat—slight theft in such a flowery land! A shadow crossed the window, and, looking up, he saw Dora in evening dress coming over the gravel walk, and entering the room by the glass doors at its farther end.

‘We have not kept you waiting, I hope Mr. Campbell. Uncle John will be down directly.’

The words were few, but before they were all uttered Angus’s dream had passed as an arrow passes through the air, and leaves no sign of its passage.

He was the Mr. Campbell of to-day once more, who never suffered any personal experiences to change his manner or diminish his courteous ease. If the past was in any degree still before him when he sat once more as a guest at the Hurst dinner-table, it might have been inferred, not from any word which fell from him, but from a few short intervals of silence, when his gaze went round the home-like room, or rested for a moment on one or other of his companions. On the elder of the two, time had brought but little change. The Vicar's hair had grown a shade or two more silvery, but his form was as erect, his glance as bright, and the grasp of his hand as firm as on the night when he had welcomed his guests eight years ago. What was the difference that had fallen upon his other companion, now that she had passed from early girlhood to completed womanhood? Much the same he believed that is felt when a summer dawn has begun to pass into a perfect day. This evening he thought her quieter and more silent than usual—perhaps the exertions of the afternoon had tired her. The dinner was not a long one, nor had the gentlemen been left to themselves for many minutes before the Vicar proposed a move. Mr. Campbell would take no more wine? Then with his leave he himself would pay another visit to his guests

in the barn. Dora, no doubt, would be found in the garden.

Into the garden Mr. Campbell went, passing through a doorway framed without by twining honeysuckle and shining magnolia leaves, crossing a strip of mossy lawn towards a corner of the terrace, where a white dress, a crimson rug, and Sultan's glossy black coat were visible. He paused, however, after a few steps, lost in contemplation of the scene now presenting itself to his gaze above the terrace balustrade. Beneath the purest, most spotless sky imaginable, lilac shadows were stretching over the hill folds above the valley, against which the cock on the church spire burned like a star in the rays of the sinking sun. Dora, seated in a low garden chair, turned round as his expressions of rapturous admiration reached her ears.

‘How exquisite!—exquisite! How perfectly lovely. This place, Miss Vaughan’—and, advancing, he took a seat beside her—‘should be called Eden, not Hurst!’

‘Perhaps then,’ she answered, ‘you may by-and-by even cease to wonder that people can live here all the year round and be happy.’

‘Ah! if all days were like to-day, the wonder would be if any could leave it. Life would pass into a long lovely dream, like King Arthur's when he was borne away from the battle, and this must

have been the place he was dreaming of—the very place :

Where falls not rain, or hail, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly—but it lies
Deep meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows——

Dora smiled. ‘Yes,’ she said ; ‘ nothing wanting but “ the summer sea.” ’

‘ That purple distance can take its place ; nothing is wanting to the loveliness of Hurst to-day, I am sure ! ’

‘ No, indeed, and if you could only see it in May with the downs and the hawthorns ! There is one place where you can look down on them filling the hollows and the broken ground—such splendid old trees they are, spreading out their great arms and meeting, all crowned with blossom, heaped up and down on the green leaves like foam on a wave. That is our “ summer sea.” ’

‘ I wish I could see it.’

‘ It is over now, but another year—May is the month of all months in which to see this place.’

‘ I should think they all seem perfect when they come, all those “ daughters of the year ”—don’t you remember ?

Each garlanded with her own peculiar flowers.

When they

Dance into light, and die into the shade.

‘Do you often read Tennyson now?’ she asked, as a look of pleasure crossed her face.

He shook his head. ‘I am afraid I do not often read anything so refreshing. But a few odd fragments sleep in one’s brain, and wake up again in such a scene as this, and in very different scenes too sometimes—in a hot law court—in the middle of some case—when you can’t conceive how they got there. One should put off one’s poetry when putting on one’s wig, and indeed I have little time to read it now. Youth is the season for reading and loving it.’

‘But do you not think that if people read it a great deal then, it is like the thirsty ground in spring drinking in the showers, which refresh the earth long afterwards?’

‘What a pleasant thought! Yes, you are right. It is true, not of poetry only, but of every form of beauty. For instance, all this beauty,’ and he looked around him, ‘will be a most refreshing draught, a cup of cold water in the wilderness to me for many a day to come.’

There was a slight pause. He stooped down to pat Sultan.

‘Shall you be coming up to Glenarchie soon, Miss Vaughan?’

‘Not this year at all,’ she answered. ‘I must not go away again just yet.’

‘Mr. Merivale would complain, I suppose. But will nothing tempt him to pay a visit him-

self? He would not find London up in Argyle-shire.'

'Some year he will go there I hope, but he is too busy now. Charlie is to go to Scotland, and Uncle John has promised him to superintend all the new buildings at Arnborough. They are to be begun as quickly as possible.'

'And is it quite necessary,' said Mr. Campbell, 'that you should remain at home yourself to assist in the operation?'

'Absolutely necessary now! I must stay to see that he does not make himself ill with that bad complaint—you know what the Italians call it, "*il mal di pietra*"! Uncle John has it very seriously sometimes. Whenever there is building about he almost always catches it. If I went away now, I might return to find a new wing added to this house or a new story to Miss Goode's! We shall have to be settling Miss Goode in her house too; we shall both be very busy.'

'Ah! I have heard of that. Charles Merivale is really playing a remarkable part as private and public benefactor for such a young man.'

'Yes, it is Charlie's way.'

'I wonder,' said Mr. Campbell musingly, 'whether it is a way that he wishes to keep entirely to himself.'

'It is not his way to wish to keep anything to himself.'

‘I wonder again, Miss Vaughan, whether I may have the privilege of asking for your advice?’

‘Certainly—if it can be worth having.’

‘No one’s I think could be so well worth having on this particular point. I have been thinking that I should like to do something for Arnborough now that it has done me the honour of electing me. Yet there is a difficulty. A member’s hands are to some extent tied; he must not seem to offer a bribe for the future.’

‘No. I can understand that.’

‘I would rather it should be a sort of indefinite thing, not directly addressed to any class of electors, and yet a substantial benefit. And it has occurred to me that if Charlie would let me I might assist him, in some way, in his scheme for the school: build a school-room or a library, or something of the kind. How do you think that would do?’

‘Very well, I should think.’

‘But some men cannot bear to have another mixing himself up with their own plans, they think it seems as if the new comer wanted to steal some of their “kudos.”’

‘Charlie would never have such a feeling as that.’

‘You think not? I felt nearly sure you would be able to tell me. But it might not be at all an unreasonable feeling; he might most

naturally wish that his own name only should be associated with the work. Many would.'

'He would not, if he thought the work could be better done with help of other people. But I am not sure that any building is needed beyond that which he is going to provide. Uncle John thinks it is ample, I know.'

'Then what would you propose?'

'Could you not give some other kind of present, some prize, perhaps, that might induce the boys to work? He is very anxious about that.'

'Is it intended that these boys should go off to the University?'

'He hopes that the best of them will, that is what he wants to introduce, though it may be difficult, as most of them are tradesmen's sons.'

'What would he say to an exhibition—a scholarship to help them off?'

'It would be excellent, I should think.'

'You are the best of advisers, Miss Vaughan. It is far better than a library. They shall have a "Campbell" every year.'

Dora's cheeks were glowing now, and her eyes shone with pleasure. 'That is charming!' she cried. 'That is really a help. How good of you! How delighted he will be!'

'But you will keep my secret for the present?'

'Oh, yes! most certainly.'

‘I must consult him first of all, you know, and as I don’t want the world to hear of it just yet, perhaps—perhaps we had better not tell Mr. Merivale?’

She agreed, owning in her heart that Mr. Campbell showed some power of penetration, for among his many merits no one could ascribe that of cautious silence to the Vicar of Hurst. Good news he always seemed to think too good a thing to be kept to oneself—and if it chanced to be bad, what so consoling as to tell it to a friend?

Nothing, therefore, was said of the new project when he joined them again, though the subject of the school itself with its intended alteration were freely discussed, and the plans lying on his study table brought out and warmly entered into by his guest, while Dora listened to their conversation, or wandered a little apart to muse on the strengthening influence of a good example, and on the double advantages that arise when generous dispositions can make common cause together. If she had been tired with the day, all feelings of fatigue had vanished now, and on their return to the drawing-room she sang the songs that Mr. Campbell asked for—the little Scotch ballad given by himself among them—forgetful of the flight of time, until it was impossible for their guest to linger longer. Then at her uncle’s call she too arose, and went out

into the summer twilight once more, her mind still filled with happy thoughts, and with a sense of satisfaction that it would be possible for the future to feel on a footing of sincere friendship with Mr. Campbell.

They parted at the wicket gate in the shrubbery walks, she to return with her uncle through the dim and fragrant garden, and he to pursue his way down the hill alone until he reached the spot where the roofs and chimneys of the Grange were visible for the last time. Here he turned and gazed once more. A glorious night was closing a glorious day, the earth was hushed and the sky serene, while in its purple depths the evening star shone over Hurst like a guardian angel keeping watch above that peaceful home. He looked long—and turned at last with reluctant steps towards the busier world in which his lot was cast.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHATEVER opinions might be held by the Merivale family on the endowment of the Grammar School by Charlie—and it was a point on which they were not unanimous—no exception could be taken to his small act of private kindness in bestowing a little home on Miss Goode. The less generous spirits would have been ashamed to object to so trifling an outlay, and the more benevolently disposed wondered at themselves for not having discovered so simple and effectual a way of making her comfortable before. Miss Goode's acceptance of the gift was given with heartfelt gratitude, tempered only by some regrets that the dear, good boy, who was just parting with so large a sum of money, should spend even a few hundred additional pounds upon herself.

She could find nothing else to regret in the prospect of a removal to Hurst. The near neighbourhood to her brother's family had proved too great a tax and fatigue for her strength; since, however much she might do for them, more had constantly been expected and claimed. Now she

would be able to receive them from time to time as visitors, while to herself there was nothing but peace and brightness in the thought of spending the rest of her days close to her best and kindest friends, and amongst those humbler neighbours whose faces, she was very sure, would welcome her from every cottage door. In the parish she would be an invaluable helper to the Vicar and to Dora, while her companionship would give constant pleasure at the Grange. Di, who came over to Hurst on Sunday afternoon, expressed sincere satisfaction in the whole arrangement.

‘Charlie could not have done a more sensible thing,’ she said; ‘and one of the best parts of it is that you will be freer to leave home. Now you can come with Harold to Scotland.’

Dora shook her head. ‘There is the Cottage to be furnished,’ she said; ‘Charlie told Uncle John that, as we were on the spot, he hoped we should do it for him.’

‘That little bandbox of a house! It can all be done in a week, and Uncle John may go and see Miss Goode every day if he likes, and gossip about all the old women in the place—not that he wants anyone when bricks and mortar are about, so there never could be a better time for leaving him.’

‘But Miss Goode will want me. She is coming here next month to get into her house. We

shall buy a pot one morning, and a pan the next, with all due deliberation, like her dear old self.'

'You live too much with old people, Dora.'

'Such as Uncle John?'

'Uncle John is young enough for anything—quite young enough to be left to take care of himself; so don't be perverse, but come up either with Harold or with my father and Charlie, whichever suits you best. You can choose your own time; we expect no one else excepting Angus later. Be a good girl and say yes, at once.'

'Oh, Di! don't tempt me.'

'It is exactly what I have come over to do—though I should have thought you needed no other temptation than Harold. He told me yesterday that he expects to be able to join his regiment in a couple of months—and who can tell where they may be sent next?—and yet you are ready to lose a whole month of his company. Just reflect on that!'

It was a reflection that Dora had made for herself some time before, yet she was firm against every kind of persuasion, and Lady Campbell went off at last, believing her to be a little obstinate and not a little foolish.

But, whatever Di might think, or her own heart plead for, Dora's conscience had settled the matter. All that morning she had been

meditating over the present state of things between Charlie and herself. Their meeting on the previous day had been the very first since he had turned away from her on the doorstep in Grosvenor Square; and he had carefully kept nearly half the hay-field between them during the whole afternoon. She was glad and sorry to remember it: glad that he was wiser, sorry that previous folly had ever made such wisdom necessary. This very day, too, instead of bringing his friend over to luncheon, on his way to do duty at Arnborough in the afternoon, she found that different arrangements had been made, and no visit to the Grange was contemplated. Such a change of habits spoke for itself, and it made her own course plain. The unchanged intercourse which since leaving London she had still wished to think of as a possibility would have to be for a time relinquished. Even if home claims could have been set aside, there must be no Scotland for her this year. If Charlie was to be at Glenarchie, she must be at Hurst. She was quite clear on this point, and tried to be equally resigned, but to resist everyone's wishes, her own included, was not agreeable. Letters from Effie came to re-enforce Di's persuasions, and it was almost a relief when the Campbells had at last left London for Glenarchie, and could request or reproach her no more.

Their visit to their Highland home this year

was to be an early one, the middle of July saw them settled there, and they would be leaving it again before the end of September. How pleasant a family party would soon be gathered in that well-remembered place, was a thought on which Dora tried not to dwell, but could not wholly exclude. She was remaining away because it was right, but it was not always easy to forgive that provoking Charlie, whose troubles she looked upon as entirely of his own making, whereas the loss of what might have been a delightful visit was forced upon her by his foolish behaviour. Even if he were completely cured in a few more months—as might surely be reasonably expected after this second explanation—who was to restore to her those weeks of Harold's company which would have been irretrievably gone? Gone, too, at a time when she and he might perhaps soon be parted from one another for a longer period and by a greater distance than had ever yet divided them, for disquieting rumours as to the probable destination of Harold's regiment had lately reached her ears. She had praised Charlie to Mr. Campbell, of course; she might even refrain from adding any discordant notes to the songs of praise which Miss Goode chanted in his honour when she appeared at Hurst; still the right to her own private opinion, that he had behaved for once without proper consideration and with very

little sense, Dora steadily reserved; there were even moments when, had it been possible, she felt not incapable of telling him so again.

But Charlie showed himself at Hurst no more, and when all the party destined for Glenarchie had betaken themselves thither, Harold among them, she soon forgot her vexation in the interest of settling her old friend in a new home, which was, by the culprit Charlie's request, and at his sole expense, to be made as perfect as possible. Another occupation she proposed to herself by way of banishing unpleasant thoughts was the cultivation of her friendship with Lucy Waller. She wished it on her own account, and was sure it would give pleasure to Harold. He had said little on the subject, but every time she had commended Lucy it had been easy to see the silent satisfaction her words had occasioned.

Commendations of Harold himself were constantly to be heard at Fernhill, but Lucy left their utterance almost entirely to her mother, only now and then quietly assenting when Mrs. Waller expressed her sense of all his kindness and good offices on their behalf. She was a gentle, simple old lady, easily led, thankful to be guided, and ready to confide. Captain Vaughan's kindness in calling almost every week was dwelt on by her with artless gratitude, and though every thought of him seemed to be

connected in her mind with that of her lost son, Dora began at last to wonder whether Lucy's mind invariably took the same direction ; also whether it were possible that Harold himself had been as much influenced by regard for the living as by attachment to the dead in his unremitting attentions to both mother and daughter. She thought over his looks and manner in speaking of the latter, and could recall nothing more than friendship might account for—but what did that prove? Whether '*L'amore e il fummo sono due cose che non possono nascondersi*' might or might not apply to ordinary mortals, she felt, at any rate, that Harold was fully able to falsify the proverb. Neither was there anything to be perceived on Lucy's side, at least by Dora, to whose nature suspicious observations or designing remarks were altogether unknown. Miss Waller did not generally appear either to seek or to shun the mention of Captain Vaughan's name. Once only she heard it with apparently less composure than usual. It was when he had been absent for some weeks, and she had been congratulating his sister on the prospect of his return.

'I must make the most of him when he comes,' said Dora ; 'he is to join again on the 25th of September.'

'So soon ! Must he really leave you then ?'

Dora heard a sigh, and looking at her com-

panion, saw that her eyes were fixed far away in a melancholy gaze. She was struck for a moment, but remembered afterwards that sighs were still often to be heard from poor Lucy.

Harold had been absent nearly a month when the Vicar returned one evening from his daily visit to Arnborough, with a face full of good news.

‘I have just parted from Anstey,’ he cried, ‘and what do you think he came to tell me? Guess—guess—but you never will!’

It was unnecessary to try, Uncle John could keep no one in suspense many moments, and the tidings he brought were such as to excite Dora’s feelings no less than his own. A plan had been formed in the neighbourhood for presenting some offering to Colonel Merivale and Captain Vaughan. The tribute was to take the form of two magnificent swords—to be publicly presented.

‘And not from the county only,’ continued her uncle; ‘the Arnborough people are coming forward famously. Ah! they have something to bless the name of Merivale for now—thank God! But the question is, how shall it all be done? Anstey would like uncommonly to have it at Atwells, with a great gathering, and speeches, and luncheon, and all that, but he fears that might seem too much like making it a county concern, and leaving Arnborough out in the cold,

and that perhaps the town hall there may be preferred to a place ten miles away. Now, here is just an opportunity for Philip himself to do the right thing! The Hanger is not too far for all the Arnborough folk who wish to come. Let him ask them all. Throw the park open to everyone, have a luncheon for the subscribers, and tea for the villagers, and games for all. It would be splendid!’

‘If he would only think it possible,’ cried Dora.

‘Why not? Anything like that is possible—it only wants a good will! Have a tent—any number of tents! I declare if people wanted to show my son honour, I would welcome half the kingdom if they wished to come—and I tell you what, my dear, if Philip won’t do the right thing at the Hanger, we will see if we can’t get them to Hurst instead!’

The Vicar was quite capable of carrying out his words; but when there had been time for the eloquent letter he despatched that evening to be received and answered, it appeared that his hospitality would not be needful on this occasion. Sir Philip’s gratification, though expressed in more measured terms, was no less sincere than his own, and if his brother and Sir Edward could ascertain that the plan would be generally acceptable, he should consider it an honour and pleasure to welcome his friends and neighbours

at the Hanger on such a gratifying occasion. He further 'trusted to his brother's kindness in considering what arrangements ought to be made for the proper celebration of the event. He should have perfect confidence in his judgment and experience, and would leave all to him.'

Uncle John being thus presented with a *carte blanche*, at once set to work to organise a reception entirely after his own heart, and Dora found it was well indeed she had not left home, so numerous and weighty were the points to be discussed and decided on. Meanwhile some surprise had been felt that, on the fifth morning after Sir Edward's letter had been written, no answer at all had arrived from Harold. Sir Philip's letter had been dated not from Glenarchie, but from Abercairn, a neighbouring place, where all the party appeared to be staying for a few days; but he did not allude especially to Harold, nor did Dora and her uncle know how to account to Sir Edward for the silence of the latter.

The mystery, however, was soon explained. As Dora returned late in the day from a drive to Atwells, she saw a most unexpected sight—Harold himself extended in the hammock on the lawn, with all the dogs around him. She ran to him at once.

'Harold, my dear Harold,' she cried eagerly, 'what has brought you home?'

'The 3.15 from London was the last thing

that did it,' he answered, lazily raising himself to receive his sister's greeting.

'But is anything the matter?'

'Not that I know of. Am I not to come home unless something is the matter?'

'But it is so sudden! You were to have stayed longer surely?'

'I had fixed nothing about it, and, when I found they wanted to go to the Grants at Abercairn, I took myself off to Jack Waller's. I've been there the last two days.'

'Really,' said Dora astonished. 'Why I thought——'

'That he was a brute? So he is, more or less; but he had asked me to come, and I wished to see the place again. I meant to come home to-morrow, and to let you hear, but I found that a fellow I wanted to see in town wouldn't be there after to-day, so I came off this morning.'

'Then have you not had Sir Edward Anstey's letter?'

'Yes; this morning. I wrote to him from the club just now.'

'Oh, Harry! isn't it delightful?'

'That's what the Dormouse thinks, is it?'

'Of course—it is to show you honour! You don't mind it, do you?'

'Well—one would be a brute oneself not to be grateful to people, if they really like to waste their money like that.'

‘It is no waste to show what we think of our’
—heroes she would have said, but changed it
into ‘soldiers.’

‘All right, I only hope no one will go and
make a great hullabaloo about it.’

‘I can’t promise you that! But tell me about
Scotland; are they all gone to Abercairn?’

‘All. Her ladyship took upon herself to
command a general exodus.’

‘And you would not go with them?’

‘Why should I stay in the house of a man I
don’t care about?’

‘What are the Grants like?’

‘Uncommonly like other people.’

‘Why should they all have gone there, when
their own time at Glenarchie is so short.’

‘Abercairn marches very prettily with Kil-
drummie. The party Di went to stay with is
—Abercairn.’

‘You cannot mean that Di is taking to match-
making? She is too straightforward and natural
for that!’

‘Match-making comes naturally to all ladies
I have understood.’

‘That is a man’s idea. But is it possible——
does Effie like him?’

‘I never inquired. As to such minor con-
siderations you had better wait till you see him.
Di will have him at the Hanger before we are
any of us much older.’

Dora sat a minute in silent thought, then inquired into the state of her brother's foot.

‘Getting on all right,’ he answered, ‘as it need do now.’

‘Why? What do you mean?’

He paused a moment, and the expression of his face changed.

‘Well, I have something to tell you, Dora, though I’m afraid you won’t like it. I went to see Hammond to-day, because I thought he could let me know for certain, and I find it is true. We are one of the first down on the list for India.’

‘India!’

Harold twisted Sultan’s ear backwards and forwards in silence.

‘When? How soon?’ said Dora presently, in a trembling voice.

‘Some time next spring.’

‘For certain?’

‘As certain as those things ever are. Don’t cry, little one.’

She raised a pale face, and brushed the tears away.

‘I will try to be brave, Harry. I know a soldier’s sister——’ She could say no more.

‘A soldier’s sister,’ said Harold, as he pulled her down for a kiss, ‘must expect to have him returning on her hands a dozen times over,

till he comes back at last without a leg to stand upon, to worry the rest of her life out of her. Now, let me get up, and look for Uncle John.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

Non ti fidar che mai non dorme Amore ;
Ei chiude li occhi allor che insidia in core.

THE end of August was now at hand, and it was generally agreed that it would be well to fix as early a date as possible for the presentation of the swords. Sir Philip himself was soon expected at home again, and the Campbells promised to hasten their own return by a few days in order to be present at the ceremony. The Darrells were in any case to have been then at the Hanger, and Lady Barrymore announced her intention of appearing with her husband, so that the whole family would be assembled on the occasion of the *fête* at the Hanger, which was to take place in the middle of September. Nor could the presence of the member for Arnborough be dispensed with on so great a day ; but here Sir Philip was forestalled, as Sir Edward despatched an early invitation to Mr. Campbell to become his guest at Atwells Manor for the time—an invitation readily accepted, the journey to and from Scotland which it must necessarily entail

upon him being apparently in Mr. Campbell's eyes of no account whatever.

Bright and fair as heart could wish dawned the 18th of September, giving all the promise a morning can give that no unwelcome clouds should appear to darken Hurst or Hanger skies the whole day long, and justifying the Vicar's happy auguries, and frequent assertions that there was no month like September for a holiday. The fresh, sweet-scented air swept into Dora's room as she threw up the window, bringing with it the sound of silver bells—the bells of Hurst ringing in Harold's honour! To her at any rate it was Harold's day. As a Merivale and eldest son, Phil was welcome to all the dignity and precedence that might be his due; but as a soldier and hero, Dora could not but believe that the foremost place in everyone's thought would be reserved for another.

Breakfast was scarcely finished when the church bells were pealing again—this time for the thanksgiving service which was to begin the day at Hurst. The village was not unmindful of their summons, and as the brother and sister walked up the aisle side by side, many a familiar sunburnt face was turned towards them by humble friends and neighbours, who well remembered the Sunday morning years ago when a little fair-haired trio, clad in deepest mourning, had moved village mothers' hearts to com-

passion as they were beheld for the first time gazing shyly around them from the Grange seat. To-day the whole congregation seemed but one family, possessed by one common feeling, as they joined together in prayer and thanksgiving within the walls of their common home—their beautiful church ; and when the service was over, it was with one accord that all waited round the church-yard gate until the party from the Grange should issue from the porch ; when sounds of ‘Wish you well, Capt’n!’ ‘Long life to the Capt’n!’ ‘A happy day to you, Mr. Harry, and many of them, sir!’ were to be heard on all sides.

The park at the Hanger was to be thrown open at half-past twelve, but long before that hour many happy-looking parties laden with baskets were assembled in front of them, intending to picnic under its great trees before the great ceremony of the day commenced. Soon a phaeton appeared containing a little white-haired gentleman, sitting straight in the centre of the front seat, the space on each side of him being occupied by two beautifully polished oak sword cases, their silver mountings glittering in the sun. This was Sir Edward Anstey, the patriarch of the neighbourhood, whose eighty years had neither chilled his martial ardour, nor dulled his courteous politeness. The business of to-day was entirely after his own heart, yet, much as he rejoiced to honour the son of an old friend and

county neighbour, his secret soul went out still more warmly towards Harold Vaughan as being 'a soldier, every inch of him.' His own part of the proceedings, however, would connect him chiefly with the family at the Hanger, where its owner himself appeared at the door, to shake him warmly by the hand and thank him as the originator of this festival day.

'Not at all! not at all!' said the bright old gentleman; 'it was the general wish—the general feeling of the whole neighbourhood that has brought it about. Ah! Campbell,' as he turned to Sir Malcolm, 'how are you? We have had the pleasure of your brother's company for the last two days, and a better hand among the partridges I never saw. He is to follow with the ladies—they will be here directly; and where are our two heroes?'

Harold, it appeared, had not yet arrived; Phil was on the terrace, which was to serve as a reception-room on this occasion, and thither all soon adjourned, as guest after guest arrived in quick succession.

Beneath lay the garden with its rainbow-tinted beds, in fullest glory, while beyond stretched the park, already alive with moving figures, where among the trees, now just entering on their autumnal beauty, rose the white-pointed roofs of large marquees, above which were to be seen crimson banners, floating in a breeze which

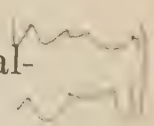
bore towards the company on the terrace the strains of a military band, already stationed near the principal tent. A brighter, more enlivening scene could hardly be imagined, yet it seemed to possess no attractions for one of the guests. At the further end of the terrace which commanded a view of the avenue, her eyes turned away from the general company, Effie Campbell sat apart, arrayed in a soft cloud of muslin, lace, and pale blue ribbons. Her little three-year-old sister Di was at her side, and to her she seemed to be attending, though her eyes were seldom turned from an opening in the long line of elms and chestnuts through which she could see the carriages approaching the house. Presently a sudden blush dyed her cheeks, and rising, she walked slowly down the terrace just as the Vicar, Miss Goode, Dora, and Harold issued from the house. A slight lameness, still observable in the walk of the latter, served only to make him still more interesting, especially on such a day; and all present were quickly surrounding the party from the Grange with welcomes and congratulations.

Sir Philip's were bestowed with marked kindness on both the brother and the sister, and great was the surprise of the latter, as soon as the procession to the tent was formed, to discover that when Phil with Lady Anstey, and Harold with Lady Barrymore had led the way,

she herself was to follow with the master of the Hanger! So Sir Philip had ordered it, and to most of the company it appeared a very proper arrangement for the day. Dora's blushes, however, lasted during the whole of the slow procession as they passed out into the park among admiring gazers, amid strains of music, and beneath triumphal arches; to be again renewed when she found herself seated among the central figures at the immense table beneath the tent.

In consequence of the Vicar's earnest desire that as many as possible should see and hear the principal performance of the day, one side of the tent had been removed, and its inmates could both see and be seen by the crowd without. Dora found herself placed by Sir Philip's side, while 'See the conquering hero comes' greeted the two brothers-in-arms as they took up the posts allotted to them in the centre of the table, and beheld the two beautiful swords lying in their cases on a small table at the entrance of the tent. On Dora's other side sat Mr. Campbell, and memory brought back to her another luncheon, when he had found her shut out and unnoticed in the window-seat of the Hanger. She smiled at the recollection, and half wished herself there again, rather than in her present too dignified position. The next minute he had turned to address her.

'Miss Vaughan, how happy I am to be al-



lowed this honour, if only because it recalls the first time I ever met you at the Hanger. Do you remember when Charlie and I had the delightful task of feeding you with the remains of the wedding breakfast ?'

Then Mr. Campbell had remembered it too ! She laughed, forgot her shyness, and looked happily round to see where all her friends were seated.

In spite of any excellence of arrangement, nothing can prevent a luncheon in a tent for two hundred hungry people from being a long and hot affair, and all the world both within and without its white canvas walls rejoiced when at last the clattering of plates and knives ceased, when the army of waiters was drawn up in a row on each side, and Sir Philip Merivale, rising, proposed the health of her Majesty and her Majesty's Forces in the Crimean war.

Scarcely had the applause died away when another figure rose, and the spirited old face of Sir Edward Anstey, beneath its crown of silvery hair, was seen looking round on the large assemblage of both gentle and simple, as one secure of a sympathetic audience. He rose, he said, to add to this general sentiment the name of one officer in particular. He described some of the especial hardships of the late campaign, and the manner in which they had been borne alike by men and by officers. England's sons of

any degree were never backward at their country's call ; whatever the homes, however high the position before them here, they would never be found shirking their plain duty by shrinking back from the post of danger. Of this a noble example had lately been given them ; and they had met here this day to show how well they understood its worth and significance. In the name of two hundred of his neighbours he begged to offer Colonel Merivale the sword that he now handed to him, while he called upon all to join in drinking his health, with sincerest good wishes for the future.

Such, in brief, was the tenour of Sir Edward's speech, and the deafening applause which followed it showed how entirely it suited the feelings of his hearers. Sir Philip's eyes shone as he bowed right and left to the company, which drank to himself as well as to his son, and the Vicar gazed with broad smiles of delight upon the shouting multitude outside, for well he knew that no such cheers had been given for a Merivale for more years than he could have counted. His expression of delight changed, however, into one of half comical distrust as the object of all this enthusiasm rose to reply. He need not have been afraid. Phil was certainly no orator, but it would have been hard to speak amiss to such an audience. He was sincerely obliged to them, and he told them so ; he said

no more about himself than could be very well excused on such an occasion, and every halt or repetition was covered with so much applause that no deficiency could be perceived when he sat down again.

Besides, this was not, as everyone knew, the end of the play, and many an eye besides Dora's was turned once more upon Sir Edward as Colonel Merivale resumed his seat. She had heard nothing as to the order of the speeches, nor had either of her companions enlightened her, and not until Mr. Campbell had risen at her side, and, looking round upon the company, had called upon them once more to fill their glasses, did she comprehend that he was about to propose her brother's health. Her breath seemed to leave her, her heart beat violently, and he had been speaking for nearly a minute before she could follow the sense of his words.

But her attention once caught was chained indeed. The subject would have been sufficient to rivet it in any case, but it was impossible to listen for many moments without feeling that the speaker was worthy of his cause. The graceful persuasive sentences, the ease and perfection of language were very different not only from Phil's halting periods, but from the honest eloquence of Sir Edward, though to the latter Mr. Campbell presently paid the compliment of owning him far more at home with his subject than he him-

self could possibly pretend to be. ‘In describing the toils and the dangers of war,’ he said, ‘we are all aware that Sir Edward does but speak of that which he has undergone. The past must never be lost in the present, the Crimea can never efface from our minds the glories of Spain and of Waterloo; and one of the happiest circumstances of this happy day, one of its features that must most gratify our brave soldiers, as they look on these gifts of their friends, is that they receive them from hands that have been so well able to wield them. For myself I am nothing but Sir Edward’s mouthpiece, yet even of that I am, and well may be, proud. Among my many causes for satisfaction, as member for Arnborough, this is not the least, that I have had the honour of being chosen to speak the mind of all my friends and constituents who are among the donors of these splendid swords; to express for you, as well as for myself, the joy, the eagerness with which we offer them to the hands of our heroes. Sir Edward speaks as the representative of the country—I of the town. Town and country acting together make up that two-celled heart of England to whose even pulsation she owes her vigorous life. Long may she flourish, and long will she flourish while guided by such fathers in the land as those we see among us now, and guarded by such sons as they whom we have to-day met to honour. Some, no less brave, hardly

less fortunate, have fallen in her service. While we mourn their loss, and place their names amongst our sacred things, let us rejoice that others are allowed to return to Old England to learn how she watched their struggles, and reverences their wounds, and glories in their noble deeds, never to be forgotten by her so long as History shall last. Sir Philip is happy in reckoning among such, a son, a son-in-law, and a friend. To one of our heroes Sir Edward has done justice already. How am I to render equal justice to the other? Need I attempt it? Are any weak words of mine wanted to rouse your feelings of admiration and pride, or could words from anyone be so eloquent as his own presence among us? The medals on his breast, the wound not yet perfectly healed, bear witness how he has fought and conquered, though not without suffering—a suffering cheerfully endured for his country's sake. He would not thank me if I recounted his gallant deeds before him. Happily it is most unnecessary. The history of Alma, of Inkermann, of the long fight in the trenches, of the cruel Redan, all speak for me. We know them—England knows them well—nor can she ever forget them; so long as the tale of her sufferings and her triumphs in that icy Crimean winter survives—and she must be dead herself before she suffers it to die—so long will survive among the names of the many who

render that tale illustrious the name of one whom you have known and watched from early boyhood ; one who has been brought up among yourselves by a father in everything but the name, whose own heart must indeed be filled to-day to overflowing with thankfulness and pride, while there is still one other, even nearer, whose feelings I will not presume to attempt to describe. May they be repeated and, if possible, intensified on many a future day ! Captain Vaughan, in the name of two hundred of your friends and neighbours, Sir Edward presents you with a sword which no man ever won more worthily.'

Dora could not look up. She heard the bursts of never-ending applause, she heard her own name coupled with her brother's in the toast that followed to his honour, but she could not respond. The warmth as well as the eloquence of the speaker had gone straight to her heart, and when at length he resumed his seat at her side, it was on him alone that she turned one glance through the drops that hung on her long lashes with the single expression 'Thank you.' The next moment there was a hush down the table—Captain Vaughan was going to speak.

It was with a different expression to those which the other speakers had worn, that Harold rose from his seat and stood for some moments silently before them, his arms folded across his

broad breast, as the sound of applause with difficulty died away. His head was erect, his face pale, while his full fearless blue eyes swept round the circle of the listening multitude with a glance that betrayed not the smallest trace of self-consciousness or embarrassment. Dora had never seen him look like this, so grave, so grand, so self-contained, that he might have been a general leading his troops to battle. A feeling of awe mingled with loving pride came over her as she gazed at him, to grow only more and more intense while she listened to the first speech she had ever heard from his lips. Harold spoke with quiet ease and perfect decision, his clear ringing accents fell distinctly on the ears of all around, reaching far beyond the tent to the crowding masses without. For the honour they had shown him he thanked them with brief dignity, and trusted that no future day would prove him unworthy of their kindness. He spoke of the pleasure he felt in receiving it through the hands of Sir Edward and by the side of a brother officer; of the attachment he must ever feel to the neighbourhood in which his sister and he had found so happy a home, with a few heartfelt words respecting the uncle to whose goodness all the prosperity that might ever come to them in life would be due. Then came a slight pause, and the blue eyes were for an instant cast down. 'Mr. Campbell,' he

said, ‘has spoken to you of some who are not here to-day—some who can never at any future day return to receive praise or rewards at your hands. But we who receive them from you know well that we do so, in part at least, as their representatives. It is for their sakes that you honour us: all that we have been able to do they have done, and more. They have laid down their lives for their country. It is they who are England’s most precious sons; in their names yet more than in our own we thank you, and I would beg you, gentlemen, to let me propose to you another toast—one which I know you will honour, not with open applause but silent reverence and truest feeling: I would give you,’ and his voice rose clear and strong, ‘The memory of the noble dead.’

Silence followed the words, then low earnest murmurs passed round the table as the glasses were lifted on high.

Angus Campbell had been watching Dora during her brother’s speech. She was leaning forward, pale with excess of feeling, her whole soul in her eyes, which were fixed immovably on Harold’s face. As the latter ceased, his own eyes seemed to be searching for something at one of the farther ends of the tent, but the next minute he turned them upon her with a momentary glance, as if understanding her sympathy. Then she trembled and sank back in her

chair, hardly conscious that any but their two selves were present in the tent.

‘You will drink this toast,’ said Angus in a low voice, as he offered her some wine. ‘No, drink it really’—for she was setting the untouched glass down again. ‘You have scarcely taken anything. You have been feeling too much.’

She thanked him, and tried to obey.

‘You never think of yourself, Miss Vaughan. You need taking care of.’ He turned away to cut off some grapes, then added more lightly, as he gave them to her, ‘Do you remember our first conversation, long ago, when your brother was wishing to be a soldier, and my prophecies for him then?’

‘Yes—oh, yes!’

‘They have come true, have they not? You can hardly wish he were anything but what he is, now!’

‘Ah, no! Dearest Harry!’ Again her eyes filled, but with happy tears only, and soon she was able to recover herself, and to listen with interest to the various speeches that followed.

Meanwhile another scene was passing in a different part of the long tent, where Effie sat by Charlie’s side. When her uncle’s speech began, she had turned towards him, leaning motionless upon her hand, and had thus remained through all the shouting and hurrahs, until at the con-

cluding words of Harold's speech, Charlie touched her arm.

‘Look,’ he said, ‘is not Miss Waller ill?’

Effie looked, saw a deadly white face, and rose herself at once.

‘She is faint,’ she said, ‘the tent is hot. Let us go.’

Several ladies began offering assistance, but Effie merely motioned to Charlie to open the side of the tent behind them, and, taking Lucy's arm, led her out into the fresh air beyond.

CHAPTER XXX.

I leaned my back unto an aik,
And thought it was a trusty tree.

‘REST on me,’ said Effie, to the pale, trembling Lucy. ‘Don’t hurry ; you will soon be better, now we are out of that stifling tent.’

Her companion attempted no answer. Even with Effie’s support she was but just able to walk, and when at last they reached the entrance to the garden, sank at once upon a friendly seat.

‘You are ill,’ said Effie. ‘I am very sorry.’

Lucy shook her head.

‘Then it was too much, you could not bear it?’

An assenting movement answered this speech, and Effie found her hand caught and convulsively grasped. She stooped and kissed the pale face.

‘Yes, it was very distressing for you—yet it was very beautiful!’

‘Yes—oh, yes!’ cried Lucy, with a sob, as she threw herself upon Effie’s shoulder, in a burst of tears. ‘He would remember him if everyone else forgot!’

‘He would never forget,’ said Effie, in a low voice.

‘No, no! Has he ever spoken to you of him?’

‘He did—once.’

‘Oh! what did he say?’

‘That he was the best, the bravest, the most unselfish——’ Effie’s own voice failed her.

‘He was—oh! he was—and he loved him so truly!’

Lucy now wept unrestrainedly, and Effie, seated at her side, tried a few simple words of comfort, while tears of sympathy stole down her own cheeks. Presently she brushed them away, and looked across the park. ‘They are coming out of the tent,’ she said, ‘we had better go on.’

‘Oh, yes!’ said poor Lucy, rising to her feet; ‘let me go home.’

‘Not yet, you are not fit; come with me to a quiet place.’

She led her down the beech walk, and across the lawns, but instead of ascending the terrace, turned round the further side of the house by a close shrubbery walk, and paused before a low door. It opened into the little cedar garden, with its giant tree and velvet turf, surrounded by verdure and ivy-covered walls. No sound broke the quiet of this most peaceful retreat, excepting the soft murmur of a little fountain flinging its tiny crystal spray into the air within the cedar shade, nor could it be entered in any

way save by the little door which had admitted them, or by the high flight of stone steps leading up to Lady Merivale's now deserted Oak room, which alone overlooked it.

Here, on a bench beneath the window, they seated themselves, secure from all observation, and here Lucy, won by her companion's manner, found voice at length to speak of the brother she had lost, and to explain that much as she had dreaded coming, yet she could not bear to be absent to-day, for she knew he would have wished her to be present—but she had found the trial, especially Captain Vaughan's speech, too much for her strength. Yet she could not be sorry—she should be glad by-and-by—to think she had not missed hearing such words. She spoke hurriedly, and with much nervous agitation, yet openly, for Effie's eager though gentle answers, her glowing cheeks and tearful eyes, proved her to be no uninterested listener, but one as anxious to hear everything about Frederick Waller—his life and death, his brave, kind nature, and, above all, his devoted attachment to Captain Vaughan—as the sister could be herself to tell. More than half-an-hour had thus passed away in undisturbed seclusion, the distant sounds and music in the park as little heeded by them as the soft sounds of the fountain near at hand, when Lucy at last broke off.

‘ Dear Miss Campbell,’ she said, ‘ I can never

forget your great kindness ; but now, if you will let me, I will go home at once.'

'Are you fit for it?' asked Effie; 'will you not come in and rest in my room first?'

'I would rather go home, thank you ; and I think the carriage must be there—it was to wait. I never intended to stay after the luncheon. Perhaps there is some quiet way of getting round—if I may come with you.'

She had taken Effie's arm, and they were moving towards the door, when it was opened from without, and Captain Vaughan stood before them.

Harold was alone. The lace of his uniform and the medals on his breast glanced brightly in the stray sunbeams, piercing the thick cedar branches, and his sword gave a strange martial clank as he entered the cloister-like stillness of the little walled garden.

'You are here,' he said abruptly. 'I have been looking everywhere.' Then, as he passed quickly by Effie, 'Miss Waller, are you better? I heard you were ill.'

With a deepening colour and trembling voice Lucy assured him in a breath that she was better—that she had not been ill.

'I was not sure if you were there,' he continued, in low rapid tones, 'or, perhaps—yet how could I have said less? You will forgive me, will you not, if I gave you pain?'

Those who knew Harold in society only might have marvelled at the woman-like gentleness with which the words were spoken.

‘Not pain ! Pleasure—but almost too great to bear.’

‘Yes ; I understand.’

Effie, who heard all, drew a quick breath, and turned a little away.

‘Miss Campbell has been so kind !’ continued Lucy ; ‘she was going with me now to order my carriage.’

‘Had you not better wait till it is ready ? The garden is full of people ; let us do it for you.’

‘If you would be so good then as to say that I want it at once.’

Harold was looking at Effie. She felt sure she read in his eyes a wish to stay where he was, and to spare him unnecessary exertion had become a habit with everyone.

‘I will go,’ she said, and moved towards the door.

‘Thank you, if you really do not mind. I might be detained perhaps, and find it difficult—’ Effie heard no more, she had shut the door.

It was with a strange sensation that she left the two in their quiet retreat, to come out into the brilliant garden, crowded with company and gay dresses. She tried to move through them as quickly as possible, but was often stopped by greetings, or to be told how admirably the pre-

sentation had gone off, what an excellent speech her uncle had made, and how interesting Captain Vaughan's answer had been. She assented to everything, and moved away as quickly as possible. She saw Dora looking at her from a little distance, but though they had met for a moment only before luncheon, she would not wait now, but, escaping at last into the house, found a servant and gave her directions. After a short time of waiting she was told that the carriage would be ready directly, and was about to retrace her steps when a better plan suggested itself, and taking her way through the now empty house, she entered the Oak room. Its glass door at the head of the garden staircase stood open, and she crossed the room towards it. But as her foot touched the threshold she stopped short. Beneath her sat the two she had left, but not as she had left them. Miss Waller's profile was plainly visible, her cheek was glowing as she sat turned half towards and half away from Captain Vaughan at her side, bending towards her as though pleading to be heard. And he *was* pleading, for the sound came clearly through the stillness of that quiet place.

‘You will think of it—you will not say “no” and ruin the happiness of a heart that is only yours.’ Such were the words that fell on Effie's ear.

‘I must not! How could I do wrong, and

leave my mother?' Lucy was pressing her hands together, as though in great agitation.

'Why will you call it wrong? And if I promise that you should not leave her? Cannot you trust me?'

'Oh, do not urge me!'

'Must I not, even for Fred's sake?' said the soft clear voice; 'will not you remember what he wished? For his sake—will you not *listen* only, if no more?'

He had raised his hand—it was to take her own! Effie saw it—she saw the hand granted, and stepped back like one struck by a sudden blow out of her momentary state of stupor. She turned from the room to go she knew not whither, hurrying down the first passage, then stopping and covering her eyes as though to shut out the scene they had witnessed. Trembling all over, she sank down upon a seat. It was the very place to which Harold had led her more than eight years ago, when he had met her, a helpless, frightened little stranger, and thrown her down in the dark passage. No one was at hand now to soothe or to comfort her as she buried her face in her hands, to shed such tears as childhood cannot know.

Meanwhile the scene without grew gayer and gayer. The music played, the crowds increased, and sports of various kinds began throughout the park. Races were to be run just outside the

gardens, beneath the eyes of the ladies who sat on the lawn, under the broad refuges of shade afforded by the hanging branches of its old trees. The younger gentlemen were for the most part busy in arranging the competitions and keeping order in the park, but Mr. Campbell had remained beneath a large beech tree at the edge of the sunk fence, where the ladies from Atwells with several others had placed themselves. His few days at Atwells had made him a general favourite, even before his recent complimentary allusions to Sir Edward had secured him Lady Anstey's good-will for ever. She was much the younger of the two, and took a most wife-like pride in her gallant old husband, and in the campaigns he had fought long before they first met one another, more than thirty years ago. She was well pleased that Mr. Campbell should prefer the garden to the park, yet looked round several times as though feeling that their party might still be capable of some improvement.

‘Where can your brother be, my dear Dora?’ she said at last; ‘he surely ought not to be hiding himself to-day.’

Dora could not tell. Luncheon had now been over more than an hour, and she had seen him nowhere. In such a crowd, however, this was not surprising, and had she gone in search of anyone, it would rather have been of Effie, who, more to her surprise, had also been invisible. Mr.

Campbell offered to look for her, and departed for the purpose. A considerable time passed before he reappeared, with Effie on his arm.

‘Found at last, Miss Vaughan,’ he cried, ‘and where do you suppose? This idle child had hidden herself in an arm-chair in the conservatory!’

Without a word Effie dropped on the turf at Dora’s side; while the latter asked if she were tired.

‘A little,’ was the answer; ‘the tent was so hot.’

‘You will soon be rested here,’ said Angus, as he took up a similar position close by; ‘this shade is delightful.’

Effie sank back silently against Dora’s chair, several young ladies, to whom the costume of Miss Campbell, the heiress, was an interesting study, contemplating her outspread skirts with deep attention. The wearer’s face they could not see; it was concealed behind her friend.

‘You look just like sisters in your pretty white and blue,’ said the good-natured Lady Anstey; ‘Eton blue too—a compliment to Harold, I suppose, Dora?’

‘Mine is; but we had not met till to-day, so our being dressed alike is an accident; and I am only a humble imitation of you, Effie,’ she added in a lower voice, smiling as she looked at the exquisite toilette flung carelessly down beside her.

‘Really?’ said Mr. Campbell in the same tone; ‘it is only right you should mention it, Miss Vaughan; perhaps we might not otherwise have known it.’

‘If you were not a gentleman, Mr. Campbell—I mean, if you were a lady—you could not have helped knowing it. Only look!’

Mr. Campbell surveyed his niece’s frills and flounces with an amused expression. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘I can easily believe that the force of fashion can no further go—but, my dear child, wouldn’t your Paris dressmaker or milliner, or whatever she is, faint entirely away if she saw all this splendour lying upon the grass?’

‘What?’ Effie sat up with the look of one who has not heard a word that has passed. The next moment she started violently, and shrank back to her former position—Captain Vaughan had come up to the other side of the group, and was answering with light words the eager welcome of his fair neighbours.

‘Mufti again!’ said Angus, glancing towards Harold’s plain clothes; ‘that is hardly fair.’

‘*You* wouldn’t be over-anxious for war-paint if you had to wear it in such a sun as this, I can tell you, my friend,’ retorted Harold.

‘What have you been about, Harry?’ asked his sister.

‘Changing my clothes, as you may see. What’s going on? Who’s going to start? Who

has been winning? Why doesn't Uncle John provide one with a "correct card of the match," I should like to know?'

'Have you seen Uncle John anywhere, or Charlie?'

'Not I.'

'What hopeless work it is finding all one's friends in such a crowd!' said Lady Anstey; 'there was someone else I was going to ask for—oh, Mrs. Waller and her daughter; are they here, poor things?'

'Miss Waller was to come; not her mother,' said Dora. 'Have you seen her, Harry?'

'Yes.'

'Where is she now?'

'Gone home some time ago.'

'She was at the luncheon, I think,' said Angus; 'close to you, Effie, was she not?'

It was Harold's turn to start now, as Effie slowly sat upright with crimsoning cheeks. 'I did not see you,' he said hurriedly.

'You thought all those white folds belonged to your sister, I suppose,' said Angus, while Effie rose to her feet.

'Where is mamma?' she said, turning away and looking across the lawn.

Harold hesitated a moment, then skirting the edge of the sunk fence in front of them, came to her side. 'Can I find her for you?' he asked. 'I think she is near.'

‘Thank you ; I can go myself.’

Harold stepped back ; not too far perhaps for his feelings, but too suddenly for his safety. One foot went entirely over the edge of the deep fence, and the next moment he had disappeared beneath it.

Dora sprang to her feet as though she would have precipitated herself after him, but Mr. Campbell interposing, jumped down, and assured her in an instant that all was right.

‘Quite right,’ said the fallen hero as he rose and looked up to the row of anxious faces gazing down at him from the lawn. Effie had rushed to Dora’s side with a face as terrified as her own ; but she kept a total silence when eager inquiries were poured upon him by every other voice : ‘Was he dreadfully hurt ?’ ‘Had he sprained his ankle—or broken his leg ?’—while Harry, laughing, shook his head, declining with thanks every kind suggestion.

‘Discover some damage somewhere, if you possibly can,’ said Mr. Campbell, ‘or we shall never forgive you for frightening us like that ; your sister thought you were killed entirely.’

‘That would have been an ignominious end, and spoilt Uncle John’s games into the bargain.’

‘Oh, Harry !’ she said, still pale with alarm, ‘how did it happen ?’

‘Pride was to have a fall, no doubt. Come down, Dormouse. As Fate has sent me into the

park, let us walk about and see all the old folk from home. We will meet you at the gate.'

She turned to invite Effie also ; but the latter was already at a distance, and Dora obeyed her brother's summons alone, to spend the next half-hour in wandering with him and Mr. Campbell among the humbler crowd, who were spreading themselves into every corner of the park.

It was a new scene to many of the holiday-makers, who knew by report only the beauty of the Hanger woods, sometimes broken into glades of mossy turf, sometimes waving with bracken and carpeted with heath, where the deer couched and the rabbits ran often undisturbed by human foot throughout the long summer day. But to-day at every turn some point of colour appeared and disappeared ; figures passed across sunny spaces, or vanished into the shady woods. Children's voices sounded pleasantly from their unseen depths, while the village elders sat in groups beneath the trees, or sought one of the large tents where fountains of tea flowed and mountains of cake disappeared. To the central tent at length came Dora and her companions, to find Miss Goode established behind a monster tea-urn, dispensing welcome cups to all around her, and supported by the united forces of the Hurst and Hanger establishments, while the swords still glittered on the table for every eye to behold. Only Harold himself could prove a more attrac-

tive object to the admiring multitude as he passed slowly down the tent, shaking hands right and left until the end of the table was reached at last.

‘Lend me your throne a minute, Goody,’ he said, as he dropped into the chair from which she rose.

‘My dear boy, how lame you are! I was sure you would be walking too much to-day. Now, let me give you a nice cup of tea.’

Harold certainly did look exhausted, but was sufficiently himself to turn up his nose unmercifully at the beverage Miss Goode presented for his refreshment.

‘If you don’t brew better stuff than this at the Cottage, Goody, I won’t come and have that tea-fight with you before I go away.’

‘Don’t talk of going! But you must come—all of you; now put up your foot on this other chair and rest; you have done a good day’s work already, I am sure!’

Harold accepted the offered resting-place, and looked with a peculiar smile into his old friend’s face.

‘A good day’s work! Well, on the whole—yes.’

‘And your speech! My dear Harry—I only hope nobody saw me cry.’

‘I didn’t, at any rate,’ said Harold, as he stroked the thin old hand beside him on the

table; 'and I'm glad of it, Goody. It might have been too much for me altogether.'

'There was one person, though you may not know it,' said Miss Goode, lowering her voice confidentially, 'whom it quite upset — Miss Waller.'

'Ah!'

'Effie took her away directly, I was told, which was much the best way; but I feel so sorry for her. Poor thing! this cannot help being a sad day for her.'

'Yes; yet I hope that, perhaps, she may not have been made very miserable by it either,' and for a moment a quaint, bright look crossed his face; but it melted at once into a different expression as he added, 'but you are right, Goody, it must have tried her greatly.'

'For my part,' said Miss Goode earnestly, 'I thought it very brave in her to come at all. But, my dear boy, you are not going yet! Rest a little longer.'

Rest, however, did not seem to enter into Harold's plans. He summoned Dora and Mr. Campbell from the other side of the tent, and announced his intention of going to look at the cricket. Charlie would be there, and most likely, Uncle John. They accordingly turned their steps to another side of the park, where a clump of old yews had stood for uncounted centuries under the shelter of a white chalk

cliff. Here a broad and level piece of grass had been devoted to the particular use of the Arnborough schoolboys, and here Charlie had been playing at cricket with them the greater part of the afternoon. At this moment he was standing with his uncle under the trees, watching them despatch a very substantial tea, which had been laid on tables in the yew trees' shade.

'Just in time,' said the Vicar; 'the very man we wanted.'

He drew Angus apart; the latter returning, after a few minutes' conversation, to Dora's side.

'Miss Vaughan, you remember what we spoke about that evening at Hurst? I ascertained from Charlie that a scholarship would be welcomed by all the authorities as well as himself, and your uncle thinks this would be a proper time to announce it. Shall I?'

'Pray do so,' she answered. 'Everyone will like it.'

Angus advanced to the head of the table, where the boys, having finished their excellent tea, were making no small noise among themselves. He smiled at the forty pairs of curious eyes fixed upon him, and when the Vicar's voice had proclaimed silence for the member for Arnborough, he told them that 'he had something in his pocket for them all to scramble for, though he was afraid it was too much of the nature of a lesson to be universally popular.'

What would they think of a Campbell scholarship every year to help off a boy to Oxford or Cambridge? With the trustees' leave, that was the present he was going to make to the Arnborough Grammar School.' Such an announcement could not in the nature of things touch the dunces very deeply—and they were not a few at Arnborough—but some of the boys' eyes glistened, and there was a good deal of laughing and whispering, when Mr. Campbell went round the table, asking names and ages, and threatening to come down and hold the first examination himself.

'He must be thanked,' said the Vicar; 'come, Charlie.'

'Do it yourself, Uncle John.'

'No—not I; you are the proper person.'

The Vicar proved unpersuadable, and Charlie came forward. A youthful speaker he looked, compared with others who had appeared that day, in his white flannel suit, and the scarlet cap, which he now took off, passing his hand through his chestnut curls, all tossed about with the exercise of the afternoon.

'Boys,' he said, 'you would not wish Mr. Campbell to think us ungrateful for his great kindness, would you? What shall we do? Give him three cheers?'

All tongues were unloosed together, and powerful hurrahs, led by the Vicar, Harold, and

Charlie, filled the air. Then Charlie placed his hands on the table, and leaned a little forward, his bright hazel eyes fixed on the face now of one boy, now of another, as he spoke again.

‘To have such a present made us at the very beginning of the new life we want to bring into our school at Arnborough is a great help, and a great encouragement. It shows how many people are taking an interest in you, how they care whether you turn out well or ill—and isn’t this a great encouragement to do well? It would be very hard for any boy constantly to be what he ought to be, unless he felt that *someone* was caring for him, that there was *some* fellow-creature to whom his success and his good conduct would give the greatest pleasure. I knew a boy once who could not feel this, and it made his life, both as boy and as man, a very hard struggle. You have often heard his name. He was Tom Barnes. He was an Arnborough schoolboy as you are, and I think all of you must know his history. It was a very sad one. I am not going to deny that he had great faults, for which he suffered greatly, and we have cause to hope that he repented of them all before he left this world. But he had also great disadvantages. There was much good in him which might have been drawn out, and have overcome the evil, if more people had been kind and pitiful to him. I hope there will never, never be

another boy at the Arnborough Grammar School with such an unhappy home and so forlorn and friendless as he. We are going to take money that would have been his to build your new school-rooms, money that came, when he lay upon his death-bed, to a man who had often known as a boy what it was to want a dinner! I want you to remember this when you look at them, that you may think kindly of him in the past, still more that you may act kindly towards any others who may be like him. Boys will often come among you who, for different reasons, need especial help and kindness; boys who are weak, or backward, or lonely, or in some way or other at a disadvantage. When you see such—will you not remember Tom Barnes? If when he had first come to school, instead of finding every boy's hand against him, there had been but one—only one—older, stronger, and wiser than he, to make a friend of him and keep him straight, all his life might have been different. Think of the influence you may have, even as boys, over those younger and weaker than you are, and remember—will you not?—now, and all your life, the especial blessing promised to those who are good to the orphans and the desolate.'

He ceased, but the boys sat motionless, their eyes bent upon the speaker, spellbound by the musical and touching accents.

‘How admirable!’ said Angus, turning to Dora.

‘From his heart,’ she answered, in a low voice.

‘Evidently—and with such ease! If he can speak like that——’ Mr. Campbell looked again at Charlie with a new expression in his face.

‘That’s not the worst speech we’ve heard to-day,’ said Harold, on her other side.

‘No, indeed.’ She took his arm, and they walked away together to seat themselves beneath the old yew tree.

‘There’s no one like old Charlie, after all,’ Harold continued.

‘Oh! no.’

‘Why do you sigh?’

‘Did I? I suppose I was wishing Aunt Eleanor could have heard him.’

Harold nodded assent. He seemed quite ready to sit down with her, and no part of the day was more delightful to Dora than the quarter of an hour that followed, in which they could discuss its events undisturbed. Harold leaned back, resting against the huge and twisted yew stem, sometimes talking, oftener silent; but if his thoughts were absent, a smile now and then visible beneath his moustache told of pleasant visions passing before his eyes.

Time was passing on, and too soon it was

necessary to rise to return to the gay world at the other side of the park. The sun was beginning to sink, the races and games were drawing to an end. Tables, with fruit and other refreshments, were standing in the garden, and as they approached the band was heard beginning a country dance. An extempore ball-room had been formed for the public by laying down a platform of planks on the grass outside, but it was as yet unused. All the spectators were crowding outside the sunk fence, above which they could see, as on a raised stage, ladies laying aside bonnets and mantles, and preparing for the dance, each with a rose or a geranium in her hair. Sir Philip, Lady Barrymore, and Colonel Merivale were standing together as the music began.

‘You will dance with Dora, Phil, of course,’ said his father.

‘With Miss Anstey, surely,’ said Lady Barrymore quickly.

‘Not to-day, my dear. This is a peculiar occasion.’

‘I shall dance with Dora. Dora’s the proper person,’ and Phil went off to find her.

Lady Barrymore’s cheek flushed. ‘Considering all that Sir Edward has been doing for us, I should say that Kate Anstey was obviously the proper person,’ she remarked, with displeasure.

‘The Ansteys will understand, I have no doubt,’ said Sir Philip calmly, ‘and, Frances, if you knew the pleasure it gives me to see those two together, you would not wish for any other arrangement.’

She looked at him with unspeakable amazement.

‘You are surprised,’ he said with a grave smile. ‘I cannot wonder; it would have surprised myself once, but now——’ Sir Philip’s eyes were upon his son leading Dora to the dance, and the sight seemed to open his heart—‘now I feel strongly how happy it would make me, could I but see Phil settled here, ready to succeed me with such a wife as that.’

‘With—*Dora*?’

‘With Dora. I know no one so well calculated to make any man happy, and to myself’—he paused for a moment—‘I may say she is like a daughter already.’

Lady Barrymore’s face had become rigid. ‘And have you any expectation of this alliance?’ she asked presently, in a voice which expressed no emotion whatever.

‘I am very far from despairing of it.’

She stood for one minute more, motionless, then joined the general company, apparently intent only upon being the dignified hostess to all.

‘Why are you not dancing?’ she inquired, pausing for a moment before Effie.

‘She did not wish it, she is tired,’ said Sir Malcolm, as he fetched his daughter a chair, and remained standing beside it while the dance proceeded. For those who had minds sufficiently at leisure to observe it, the ‘Triumph’ was a very pretty sight, gay enough for the day, yet well suited in its old-fashioned stateliness to be danced beneath the shadow of the Hanger. The crowds applauded, and everybody smiled, including Miss Anstey, who appeared to find in Mr. Campbell an excellent substitute for Colonel Merivale himself. Almost as soon as it was over another dance was called for, but what must it be? Quadrilles were voted dull, and waltzes difficult upon such a floor. Someone seemed to have taken upon himself to solve the question, for in another minute a lively air began with the best imitation of the bagpipes that the band could produce.

‘Aha!’ said Sir Malcolm, kindling into instant life, ‘a reel! They want old Donald here with his pipe—but surely they are not going to try a reel on the grass.’

‘A reel it is,’ said Angus, coming towards them, ‘a real Glenarchie reel, so come, Effie.’

She began to excuse herself, but her uncle would not listen. He had secured, not without difficulty, a promise from Dora that, if Effie danced, she would do the same.

‘My dear child,’ he said, ‘why do you keep

sitting there, looking as if you cared for nobody. Is anything the matter ? ’

‘ Nothing at all,’ said Effie, instantly rising. ‘ I am coming.’ Anything was better than such speeches as that, and she walked away to take off her bonnet, and to let Miss Goode do what she liked to her hair, careless who might be her partner since *one* person she was secure that it could not be.

Charlie was next secured by Mr. Campbell, and he could return to Dora with the assurance that the reel was waiting only for her.

Other quartettes were forming, and the dance began. This was a very different affair from the country dance, and the spectators in the park gazed open-eyed with astonishment, that ladies and gentlemen should choose to exert themselves in such a marvellous manner. There were other expert dancers besides Mr. Campbell, leading different reels, but none who could equal him, and certainly no lady present could rival the dainty exactness of the steps which Dora and Effie had learnt long ago to the strains of Donald’s pipes. Charlie also performed as if to the manner born ; even Effie smiled to see him in his picturesque red and white costume, repeating Angus’s gestures and ‘ houlikin,’ with much correctness, as he threw his scarlet cap into the air. To Dora it seemed as if she were seventeen once more, so inspiring were the music and the exer-

cise, and amid applause and laughter the four kept on unwearied, when all the other dancers had paused, tired out ; till Sir Malcolm entreated that the musicians might be ordered to cease playing.

‘ You maniac ! ’ said Harry, as he pulled his sister away to a seat, ‘ you’ll be dead to-morrow ! ’

Dora protested she was not tired—‘ nothing was so delightful as a reel when you had once begun ! ’

‘ Nature intended you for a Scotchwoman, Miss Vaughan,’ said Angus, as he threw himself into a second seat. ‘ How the people laughed at us, the savages, performing for their benefit ! Certainly I never thought to make such an exhibition of myself in my old age ; and here comes Malcolm with a face as long as if it was going to cost me my seat. Well,’ as his brother paused before them, ‘ what have you to say to us after our great performance ? ’

‘ That I do not think Dora should sit out of doors in that dress when she is so warm. I have just sent Effie into the house ; ’ then advancing a step in front of Harold, ‘ You had a fall I hear,’ he said ; ‘ I hope you are not hurt.’

‘ Thank you, it was nothing. I jumped and saved myself.’

‘ What are your present plans ? ’ said Sir Malcolm, after a short pause.

‘ I join on the 25th.’

‘Indeed; is that a settled thing?’

‘Quite—some time ago.’

‘Ah! I was not aware,’ and Sir Malcolm walked away.

Something in his manner struck Dora as unusual. It certainly was not cheerful; had it been possible, she would have said that it was not even cordial, but towards Harold that would have been absolutely impossible. She could not wonder long; another partner came up to claim her, and dancing began again, to be kept up with much spirit in both park and garden, until the twilight was falling, and the guests, collecting together, were beginning to talk of their carriages, when a fiery star, shooting up into the darkening sky, showed that there was still something to wait for, and the next half-hour was spent in watching the fireworks that concluded the *fête*. Then the guests, high and low, turned to depart in earnest, with many a hearty, well-deserved cheer from the park and many a cordial ‘good-night’ in the house and garden, as carriage after carriage rolled away—the Ansteys and Mr. Campbell lingering to the last, to exchange congratulations with their hosts on the complete success of the whole proceedings.

‘Where is Effie?’ asked Dora presently, as the family party gathered round the Hanger dining-table for a last late meal.

‘In her room,’ answered Di; ‘she wants nothing but a cup of tea.’

‘May I take her one?’

‘You can go; but don’t let her keep you—she is quite tired out.’

Dora took the cup, and ascended to Effie’s room, meditating upon all the pleasures of this perfect day, and when a locked door was opened to her knock, and Effie, in long white dressing-gown and loosened hair, stood before her, she began to express the happiness she felt.

‘My head aches so,’ was Effie’s only answer.

‘Does it? I am sorry! You must get to sleep at once. Oh! Effie, what a glorious day! To see them honouring him like that, and to know that however much they may say or do he deserves it all, and more!’

Effie’s head fell forward on her friend’s shoulder. She moaned as though in pain.

‘Poor child, I must not tease you with talking now. Good-night, dearest—and sleep well.’

CHAPTER XXXI

GREAT was the pleasure with which Miss Goode prepared for the friends who were to honour her first tea-party with their presence. The Campbells, some of whom would come, were to spend but four nights at the Hanger before beginning a course of visits; it must therefore be held on the second day after the Hanger *fête*, the first being impossible, as Harold had gone for the night to London, promising to return in time to appear at the Cottage.

This simple house-warming was to take place, in Irish fashion, in the garden; a table was therefore spread beneath a wall gay with the red leaves of a Virginian creeper, and on the white damask cloth appeared a china tea-set, Effie's present, with fruit and flowers from the Grange, and many good things besides, very attractive in the eyes of half a dozen little Campbells and Darrells, who, with Sir Malcolm and Effie, did not fail to appear with due punctuality. The Vicar and Dora had already arrived, and when Charlie, the 'Founder of the Feast,' as Miss Goode delighted to call him, had also joined

them, having returned early from a shooting party for the express purpose, his grateful hostess looked a happy woman indeed while she dispensed thanks and tea to her company with equal warmth and liberality.

Still she turned now and then towards the little garden gate, for the party was not yet complete. The carriage had been sent for Harold more than an hour and a half ago, but neither it nor he had appeared, and everyone was soon satisfied, or the reverse, that he had certainly missed the train, and could not come at all. Everyone, that is to say, but Miss Goode herself: Harold had promised to come—come, therefore, she was convinced that he would—and the Vicar quoted ‘Bradshaw’ in vain. Faith was to be rewarded, though tea was more than half over when Harold appeared at the gate. Charlie, instantly springing up, hurried towards him, and the two stood in earnest conversation together for a couple of minutes.

‘Come, Harry,’ called the Vicar. ‘Come! we have been expecting you this hour past.’

‘Sorry to be late, but I did not come straight from the station,’ said Harold, as he shook hands with Miss Goode, and raised his hat to the rest of the company. ‘I drove round.’

‘Round where?’

‘To Fernhill.’

There was an exultation in Harold’s tone, very

perceptible to two of his hearers. Both Dora and Effie looked up, the latter to look away the next moment; but Dora's eyes rested on her brother's well-pleased countenance in some perplexity. What had Harold been doing at Fernhill when he ought to have been at Miss Goode's? Since his return from Scotland he had called there, she believed, twice, or possibly three times. What could have taken him there to-day, the very moment of his return from London?

'Never mind where you went, my dear Harry, since you have come now,' said Miss Goode, intent on hospitable cares. 'Here is your tea, and wouldn't you like a nice little bit of cake?'

'Thanks, Goody, I should, and wouldn't you like a nice little bit of news?'

'News, oh! What?' Miss Goode paused, the sugar-tongs uplifted in her hand. 'Is anyone going to be married?'

'More than one—two.'

'What?' cried his uncle, 'a marriage in the neighbourhood? Can we guess it? Which must we guess?'

'Suppose you try the lady.'

'A lady! A neighbour going to be married! Why, it's Kate Anstey—Kate or Caroline. No, it can't be! Anstey would have told me directly. Why, Fernhill—it's Miss Waller! Harry, it is Lucy Waller.'

'So far, so good, and now—the gentleman?'

Dora's heart seemed in her mouth; she looked at her brother with startled eyes. What was he—what could he be going to say? Not *one* name. No—it was impossible! But she had caught a glance from his eye of mingled triumph and mischief, and back upon her mind rushed Di's prophecy: 'Harold was deep; Harold would astonish her.' Still it was impossible, in spite of this painful beating of her heart—it was impossible! Harold would never treat her like that!

'Well, is everyone asleep?' continued Harold, as he drank his tea with much apparent composure. 'Can nobody guess?'

No one noticed how Effie pulled leaf after leaf from a flower before her, and tore them to pieces with trembling hands.

'No,' said the Vicar, shaking his head; 'I can't think of anyone—unless it's yourself, you rogue—or Charlie there.'

'Tell them, Harry,' said Charlie, who had been watching Dora's face.

Harold smiled once more, stirred his tea, finished it, and, setting down the cup, announced, with much deliberation:

'Miss Waller to—Mr. Grey.'

'Mr. Grey! Miss Waller! Mr. Grey!' echoed various voices in various tones of astonishment. Effie rose hastily from her seat, sat down again, and turned away her head to

hide the crimson tide which rushed to her face, and then, retreating, left it paler than before. Her heart beat violently ; there seemed to be a swarm of bees about her ears ; she heard none of the many questions usually poured out upon the bringers of such intelligence.

‘I never thought of them together for a moment,’ said Dora, when she could speak for wonder. ‘I hardly knew they were acquainted. Are you not astonished yourself, Harry?’

‘Not altogether,’ was the dry reply. Then, stooping down to take another piece of cake, he whispered, ‘Didn’t I tell you he could be warranted safe?’

There was the mischievous glance still on his face, while Charlie’s gravity was quite upset.

‘What are you two boys laughing about?’ demanded their uncle. ‘You have not been making up this marriage between you?’

‘Not precisely.’

‘He has worked for it for years!’ exclaimed Charlie.

Harold kicked him under the table.

‘What! Has it been a long attachment?’ said Dora.

‘Six years or so,’ answered her brother.

‘Six years! and why has it been put off so long?’

‘There were a few small difficulties, only recently surmounted by a generous benefactor.’

‘ Ah ! Money, I suppose,’ said Sir Malcolm.
‘ And pray, who may the benefactor be ? ’

‘ I have great pleasure in pointing him out—
Mr. Charles Ernest Merivale.’

‘ Nonsense ! ’ cried several voices—while Miss Goode, fixing her eyes pensively upon Charlie, cried, ‘ Oh ! my dear boy, it’s very wicked of *me* to say a word, but really, if you go on this way, in a little while you won’t have a penny left.’

Charlie was laughing, and could only shake his head, but Harold patted his old friend’s shoulder in a consoling fashion. ‘ Never fear, Goody, he has got Fortunatus’s purse, and won’t be ruined yet awhile. The fact is that the school wanted a new head-master, and Charlie has found one for them, and an income for Grey and Miss Waller at the same time—that’s how it is.’

‘ There ! ’ cried the Vicar to Charlie, ‘ then I may speak now ? ’

‘ As much as you like, Uncle John.’

‘ What ? ’ cried Dora ; ‘ did Uncle John know he was going to be the new master ? ’

‘ More than a week—more than a week ! Never said a word ! Harry made me promise ! ’ and the Vicar leaned back in his chair with a modest air of conscious virtue.

That Uncle John should have kept anything to himself for a week was indeed a bewildering

idea. Dora began to feel that everyone had been in a league together to blind her.

‘What have you been about, Harry?’ she cried, ‘and where did it happen, and when?’

‘Where?—At Fernhill. When?—Yesterday morning. I could fancy another cup, Goody—thank you. Your brew has improved since Tuesday.’

‘And what have you had to do with it?’ Dora continued.

‘That we will leave to your lively imagination.’

‘Hardly fair, I think,’ said Sir Malcolm, whose countenance, during this conversation, had exhibited a curious struggle between stiff reserve and cordial interest.

‘Not fair at all,’ echoed the Vicar, ‘but we shall get it out of him this evening—never fear.’

Dora felt she could not possibly wait so long, but Harold had withdrawn himself and his tea to the company of the children, who were now running round the garden, and it was necessary to apply elsewhere.

‘Tell us, pray,’ she said, turning to Charlie.

‘Yes, tell us,’ echoed Effie, in a low voice. ‘How was it?’

‘It began a long time ago,’ he answered. ‘Grey had no regular home as a boy, his parents were dead, and he used often to go in the holi-

days to the Wallers' with Fred—afterwards he went from Oxford. When he told Mr. Waller he was attached to his daughter, Mr. Waller wouldn't hear of it. Grey wasn't half rich or grand enough to please him. He had no particular prospects, you know, except being an Oxford coach, and getting a living in time. So he was told never to come to the house again.'

'So much for parents!' said the Vicar wrathfully. 'And what did she say, poor girl?'

'I don't suppose she had a chance of saying anything. Mr. Waller ruled everybody as he liked, and Jack backed him up entirely; but Fred was all for Grey, and took it very much to heart. In the Crimea he told Harry all about it, and the very last time they were together—the evening before Inkermann—said that he meant to write to his father and beg him to remember, in case anything happened to him, that this marriage had been his great wish. Grey had gone out to the Crimea, you know. He gave up Oxford—he wanted a change. After Inkermann, Harry told him what Fred had said, and that he himself now meant to tell Mr. Waller as soon as he got back, and he wrote to me about it in case—that is, he thought it as well I should know too. Then, as time went on, he thought it better to write; so he did, but the letter came when Mr. Waller was so ill, a little while before his death, that Mrs. Waller

did not dare read it to him for fear of agitating him. Well—poor man—he died, you know. Then Harold returned, and when he saw Mrs. Waller in London, spoke to her about the whole affair ; but, poor old lady, she didn't know what to do between her husband's wishes and Fred's wishes.'

'Better go by her daughter's wishes,' said the Vicar ; 'she had the most to do with it.'

'Yes, but they were both mortally afraid of Jack ! He had set his face against it, and Harry found that while they lived with him or close to him they would never dare to let Grey come near the place. But, luckily, *he* was going to be married, and Harry determined, if he could, to get them right away, and that was what made him so anxious they should come to Fernhill.'

'Clever fellow !' ejaculated Uncle John.

'Yes, but then the trouble was with Grey. He refused to come near them until they asked him, because he had thrown up his income as a coach, and had nothing but a temporary curacy—nothing to support a wife. Harry had an idea he might have come here as curate, you know,' said Charlie, hesitating a little.

'Curate, indeed !' said the Vicar ; 'who wants a curate ?'

'Well, Uncle John, if anyone *did*, he would have been a great catch. But Grey said it

would be very wrong for him to come into the neighbourhood unless he could be sure that they wished it.'

'That's right. That's an honourable man.'

'And though Harry felt certain Mrs. Waller wished for the marriage in her heart, he saw that she was still too much afraid of Jack to dare to take any decided step. But then the master-ship turned up, and we both thought directly what a splendid plan it would be if we could get him for Arnborough, and if they could marry on it—not that it is half good enough for him, yet we thought that, things being as they were, he might be willing to take it, and so he was. Still, he said that, even if I appointed him and the trustees accepted him, he would not come unless he were to be married. So we asked him down to preach at Arnborough, and got the trustees to go and hear him, and we persuaded him to come down here on the afternoon of the Saturday to see Miss Waller—as it were in a common way.'

'In the hayfield?' exclaimed Dora.

'Yes, in the hayfield.'

'How little we knew! But did she know he was coming?'

'Not at all. She had not seen him for a long while, and he thought her very cold and reserved, and I really believe that if it had not been for Harold he would have refused the

mastership at once, and given it all up! But Harry remembered what Fred used to tell him, and felt certain she did care for him, and was only afraid of making her mother unhappy and of producing a family quarrel; so we went on hoping, and would not think of any other master; and while we were in Scotland Harry determined to go to Jack Waller himself. He did, and he got him to promise not to oppose it any more if Grey had the mastership. Then Harry wanted Grey to write or go down at once to Fernhill, but he wouldn't; he had been so disheartened by her manner here. So Harry determined to see Miss Waller and talk to her himself.'

Effie, who had been listening without moving a finger, sank back in her chair and drew a long breath.

'He could not get at her alone,' Charlie continued, 'until last Tuesday in the Cedar Garden, and then found it was just as he had thought. She had always cared for Grey, but didn't like going against her father's wishes nor leaving her mother alone; but, when he told her everything, she consented at last to see Grey again. Harry wrote to him that very afternoon, and he came down the next morning—yesterday. So now everything is right—and it's Harry's doing from beginning to end!'

'With your help,' said the Vicar. 'You appoint the master.'

‘Yes, but the luck is on our side there. He is only too good for us.’

‘And you will have absolutely married him and settled him between you,’ said Sir Malcolm.

‘Harold has—he has taken all the trouble. He said he never would give it up so long as he believed they cared for one another.’

‘How strange!’ said Sir Malcolm, in a low voice, as he looked towards Harold, surrounded by the children on the other side of the little garden.

‘Why is it strange?’ asked Charlie.

‘I should not have thought Vaughan a likely man to take it up.’ Sir Malcolm rose and moved away.

Had Dora’s mind been at liberty, she would have been struck by Sir Malcolm’s coldness of manner. But the story she had heard completely possessed her thoughts. ‘How happy he looks!’ she said, gazing at her brother.

‘Yes, he well may be.’

‘And you too, Charlie,’ she said, turning from the one to the other of the young men, who had been working unweariedly together for a friend’s happiness. ‘You must be as glad as he.’

He raised his eyes to hers.

‘Yes, Dora, I am glad indeed.’

She pushed back her chair, and rose hastily, following Effie, who had already wandered down

one of the little paths, and was standing by the fence at the bottom of the garden, her eyes not downcast now, but uplifted to the sky, as though there alone the feelings that shone through them could find a resting-place. The golden flush of an autumn sunset had tinged the whole pearly canopy above their heads, where flights of little cloudlets, round and soft like rosy cherubs, were deepening every moment in brightness as they drifted slowly across it. Most beautiful it appeared to her whose heart was awaking, as an ice-bound world awakes beneath the reviving breath of spring. Sad indeed, when such gleams are but transient visitors, to vanish as winter returns in all its former bitterness!

‘Sister, sister!’ shouted some voices behind her.

Effie turned, and saw little Angus and the still lesser Mysie rushing down the path, while Captain Vaughan sauntered slowly behind them. A light came into her eyes, and a soft colour to her cheek, as though reflected from the evening clouds.

‘A kitten!’ cried Mysie, holding up her little yellow treasure. ‘Miss Goode lent it to me. She didn’t lend it to Gussie; don’t let him take it, sister!’

‘I don’t want it,’ called out Gussie scornfully, stopping short, while Mysie and the kitten took refuge by Effie’s side. ‘Kittens are only for

girls ! I'm going to have a young tiger ! Captain Vaughan will send it from India—he's promised it. I say, you really are going there ? you'll really send it, won't you ?' inquired Gussie, as he rushed back to seize Captain Vaughan's hand.

'I really am going, but as to really sending it, why, I have to catch it first, you know.'

'Going where ?' said Effie, turning to Dora.

'Oh, Effie ! Do you not know ? He is going to India.'

'India !' Effie stood motionless. Harold came up to them. 'You are not going there—to India ?'—she said, looking incredulously in his face.

'Certainly. We are ordered out.'

'But not now—not soon ?'

'Early next spring.'

'But not you yourself ?'

'Naturally ; if the regiment goes, I must go with it.'

Harold's tones were unalterably careless and indifferent. He still sauntered on after the children.

'Oh, Dora !' cried Effie, 'is it true ?'

'Too true ; he is really going.'

'But I never knew—he never told me !' She clasped her hands together. 'No ; he never told me !'

In one moment a flash of light came over

Dora's mind. 'Effie!' she cried, gazing on her friend—'oh! dearest Effie!'

But Effie broke away and hurried down the garden to the house. Dora was about to do the same, but paused—reflected—and followed more slowly.

The carriage was already at the garden gate. Sir Malcolm was summoning the children. Effie was at her father's side, speaking to Miss Goode. She turned at Dora's approach, kissed her without a word, and went down the path to the carriage, looking neither to the right nor to the left. The sky had grown grey; the clouds were but pale ghosts of their former selves; all light and colour had suddenly left them. A chill breeze was springing up; she shivered as she entered the carriage, and drew her cloak around her. The children followed, clambering merrily in, calling out 'good-nights' to the friends they left behind them. The door was shut, they were moving off, and Effie sank back in a corner of the swiftly rolling carriage, to close her eyes upon a weary world.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE family party which had been assembled to do honour to the Hanger festivities must again for a time disperse, the Darrells alone remaining. Sir Malcolm, with his wife and daughter, disappeared on the fourth day, leaving only the little ones behind them. They were to return for a week in about a fortnight's time, in order to receive some friends of their own who were invited to stay at the Hanger, and then to depart as before, having promised various friends to visit them during the shooting season. The Barrymores returned home, but not before the ever watchful Frances had concluded a piece of business with much satisfaction to herself. Not three minutes after her father had confided to her his cherished and secret wish with regard to Phil and Dora her resolution was made, and that same evening injunctions were issued to her slow but obedient husband, in consequence of which Phil found himself warmly pressed the next day to fulfil an old half engagement of coming that autumn to spend a couple of months among Irish pheasants and Irish foxes. When his promise

to this effect had been obtained Frances breathed more freely. Not that she believed there was any attachment on her brother's part to be guarded against, but the future is uncertain, and in all uncertainty there may be an element of risk. Marriage in her eyes was generally an affair of convenience, arrangement—not seldom of mere chance. Phil might at any time feel that it would be as well that he should marry, and Dora being at hand, he might chance to fancy her rather than another, being influenced perhaps by mere indolence, by a lazy acquiescence in his father's known wishes, or by some schemes and arts on Dora's side, which would doubtless be used were she but once aware of Sir Philip's desire that she should be his daughter-in-law; for of Dora's behaviour, were this truth revealed to her, Lady Barrymore entertained not a moment's doubt. Dora was ambitious—so she interpreted the fact of her having already declined various offers; she rated her beauty and her claims at a high value; she had perhaps always secretly hoped to conquer Phil at last; in any case, that she would decline such a rise in life as this, if it ever were in her power to make it, was too absurd an idea to be for a moment entertained.

Lady Barrymore therefore quitted her father's house with a lightened heart, conscious that she had done her utmost to cross his fondest hopes

and wishes by removing her brother during the principal part of his long leave from the evil effects of Dora's neighbourhood. So contemptible a match was not to be thought of for a moment. Her father's brain must absolutely be softening! When the heir of the Hanger should choose a wife, it must be something more than a mere marriage. It must be an alliance!

Dora's mind, meanwhile undisturbed by any comings or goings of Phil, was chiefly occupied by the near departure of one far more interesting and important in her sisterly eyes. Harold was about to rejoin his regiment, after eleven months' absence, and it was impossible not to be sad at the prospect of losing him, especially when she reflected that a far longer and wider separation lay before her; and that in all probability he would soon be gone for years. She was anxious, too, about his foot, which was by no means cured. He owned to no suffering and no inconvenience from it, and encouraged no inquiries, so that for the most part she observed him in silence, and trusted that it was merely her own anxiety which made her fancy that at times he was even more lame than before he went to Scotland. He was in high spirits about the newly formed engagement at Fernhill—as open now as he had been reserved before, telling her all his hopes and plans, his difficulties and uncertainties, and returning her half-reproachful

comments on his secrecy by laughing at her unsuspecting and innocent mind.

‘Simple child!’ he said; ‘anyone else would have guessed there was something on hand long ago.’

She looked at him for a moment with a serious face. ‘Harry,’ she said, ‘if I do not guess these things easily, will you not tell me when there is anything to be told?’

He laughed again—inquired whether she thought it was going to be his mission to settle young women in life, and left her.

Hitherto Dora had never wished for any especial gift of penetration in matters such as this; but now there was one—perhaps there might be two—on whose behalf she earnestly wished she could exercise it. Lucy Waller’s happiness was very satisfactory; it was a true pleasure to see her changed and radiant face, and especially charming to listen to her heartfelt, touching words of gratitude when she spoke of Harold. But another person’s feelings must be yet more interesting to Dora; another person’s sorrows must touch her still more deeply. Was Effie in sorrow? Had that sudden exclamation of distress a deep and settled source, or had it proceeded from a general regret and sympathy with herself alone? The words that had broken from her hardly bore out the latter supposition, yet, even if her fancy had been touched, Dora

felt that it would accord but ill with her delicate pride and quiet self-respect to think much of any man who had not first sought her. Her own love for Effie was such, that to have been able to hope she might some day be her sister indeed would have been a supreme happiness, but in such a rose-coloured vision she had never ventured to indulge. Truth compelled her to admit that never, either by manner in her presence or by reference in her absence, had Harold excluded Effie from his usual defiant and critical attitude towards young ladies in general. One alone had been differently treated by him in this respect, but she had been Lucy Waller—not Effie Campbell. She resolved, therefore, as much as possible, to forget all that she believed Effie would wish her to forget, and to make no unnecessary allusion to Harold when they should meet again.

He had been gone nearly ten days when the Campbells returned to the Hanger, bringing with them their Scotch neighbours, the Grants, to be welcomed within its walls for the first time. Other visitors, friends of the Darrells, were also there. So long as Sir Philip could be left undisturbed in his own rooms, where his time was now chiefly spent, his sons and daughters were welcome to fill the rest of the house as they pleased. Habits of seclusion were growing on him, and he gladly left the reception of guests

to Lina and Di, and the management of the shooting to Phil or to Charlie.

In the large party now again assembled at the Hanger, Dora found there was little opportunity for any but the most general conversation with Effie, whose time appeared to be wholly devoted to entertaining their present guests. Remembering Harold's remarks, Dora observed the Grants with an attention which soon showed he had not been wrong in declaring that they were particularly like other people. She could see nothing remarkable either in the brother or the sister, excepting—and this was no unimportant exception—the remarkable attention paid by both to Effie, attentions which were, if not enjoyed, at least endured, with no appearance of dislike on the part of their object.

Effie's manner was no longer what it had been. She was more restless and excited; more ready to talk and laugh than formerly; occupied entirely, as it seemed, with parties, engagements, and excursions. At Hurst Grange she appeared but once, a Grant being on either side of her on that occasion. Uncle John might and did scold her openly for her desertion of him, but Dora was silent. She watched Effie with a painful feeling, to which she could not have given a name. It was pain for her friend, not for herself. To believe that Effie's affection could ever alter was impossible, yet she knew not what to think

of her present mood, which showed no sign of changing during this week at the Hanger.

Nor was Effie the only puzzling member of the family. Dora could not help observing a coldness and constraint in Sir Malcolm's manner when addressing herself, nor did he or Di make any attempt to come over to Hurst. She could think of no cause of offence on her own side, excepting a refusal to visit Glenarchie, and it was impossible they should be really angry with her for this. It could not be with Harold that they were displeased—that seemed more impossible still when she recalled Sir Malcolm's strong regard for her brother; besides, who could ever find any just cause of complaint against Harold?

She hoped she might have been over-fanciful, and that when they met again everything would be as usual. She wrote to Effie more than once after she had quitted the Hanger again, but no answer came. Not much was to be learnt of them from others. Charlie was now at home, but of him she saw scarcely anything; he came no more to Hurst. It was a change which no one but herself seemed to notice. Her uncle, always busily employed himself, and frequently meeting his nephew out of doors, appeared quite unconscious that he had not set his foot inside the Grange during the whole autumn.

So uncertain, indeed, had her communication

with the Hanger become, that it was through the servants alone that Dora one day learnt, with much surprise, that Sir Malcolm, with Lady Campbell and Miss Campbell, had returned suddenly the day before. She knew they had not been expected for at least another week, and determined on an early visit to Effie the next day to inquire into the reason of their unlooked-for re-appearance.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

As soon as possible on the following morning she was on her way to the Hanger, and learnt from the servant who opened the door that the information she had received was correct. Sir Malcolm and Lady Campbell had returned two days before. With an indefinable feeling of anxiety she hurried up the stairs, and, pausing at a well-known door, knocked, and was bidden to enter. On a sofa beside the fire sat Effie, leaning back with half-closed eyes, which she languidly lifted at her visitor's approach. But in another moment she had sprung from her seat.

‘Oh, Dora! is it you?’

When Dora could draw back from the close embrace that followed, she looked anxiously at the pale troubled face before her.

‘What has brought you back, dear Effie?’ she inquired. ‘You are not ill?’

‘No—only not very well, nor papa either, so mamma sent an excuse to the Adairs, and we came back here instead.’

‘And you never let me know of your return?’

Effie’s head drooped. ‘I wanted to come to you yesterday,’ she said, ‘but mamma thought it was going to rain.’

‘But you did not write. You did not answer my letters.’

‘No ; there seemed nothing to say.’

Nothing to say from three gay country houses in succession ! Dora looked earnestly at the pale cheeks and dark-ringed eyes. This was a very different creature to the talking, excited Effie who had quitted the Hanger a fortnight before.

‘That is not often the case when we are apart,’ she answered. ‘Dear Effie, is anything wrong ? Will you not tell me ?’

There was one moment’s pause, in the next Effie’s arms were round her, her calmness all gone. It was some time before agitation allowed her to speak, and then the words came in disjointed sentences only.

‘Oh, Dora—forgive me—I didn’t mean to cry—but I have had no one to speak to—and I have been—so miserable !’

This was all that could be extracted at first, but presently, in reply to Dora’s earnest inquiries, she placed a letter in her friend’s hand. It was a short note from Mr. Grant to Lady Campbell, asking, in very proper, though slightly

pointed, language whether he might again hope to be received at the Hanger for a couple of days before returning to his Scotch home.

Dora read and pondered before speaking. 'Why does he want to come?' she asked.

A deep sigh was the only answer.

'Effie, if you will not trust me, how can I help you?'

'Oh, Dora!' and Effie raised a piteous face. 'I do want you to help me—but you cannot. No one can.'

'Only tell me the truth, and then let us see. If Mr. Grant comes, is it because he wants to see you?'

'I suppose so,' sighed Effie faintly.

'And do you want to see him?'

'No,' was the still lower answer.

'Then why should he come? Has this letter been answered?'

'No. Mamma brought it to me just now; she wants him——' Effie stopped.

'Not to come here when you do not like it!'

'She says,' murmured Effie, 'that it is only a visit—that he will not—that he need not——' Again she stopped, a sudden blush burning on her pale face.

'I must ask once more,' said Dora, 'do you wish him to come or not?'

Effie broke away with a despairing gesture.

‘I! no, I wish for nothing! But mamma wishes it—they both wish it—and it doesn’t matter—nothing that happens to me matters now!’

‘Oh, Effie! When people say that, they may do things that matter—their whole lives long.’

Effie looked round with a strange set smile. ‘But if lives are not going to be long, and if they cannot be happy, what can one do better than please other people?’

A silent terror rushed over Dora. What was Effie going to do? She had risen from the sofa with the same unnatural expression on her face, the letter in her hand. ‘I must take it back,’ she said. ‘Mamma told me to bring it soon. She must answer it.’

‘Not to let him come!’

‘Why not? If they like it, what can I do better than please them? What else have I to think of?’ She tried to move, but trembled and caught hold of the mantelpiece for support. Dora put an arm round her and placed her on the sofa once more.

‘Truth,’ she answered. ‘Truth above all.’

‘Truth?’ Effie clasped her hands despairingly. ‘Oh! who *is* true? Where is truth?’

Dora rose in swift resolution. ‘Stay here,’ she said, ‘until I come again.’ The next minute she was in Di’s room, the letter in her hand.

Lady Campbell, who was seated at a writing-

table, looked up in surprise, and greeted her with no great cordiality, inquiring how long she had been in the house, and whether she had seen Effie.

‘I have just left her room,’ Dora answered. ‘Di, what is the matter with her? she looks very ill, and—not happy. She has just shown me this.’

She held out the letter. Di caught it from her hand with a heightened colour.

‘Why has she not brought it herself?’ she said. ‘Call her here, if you please.’

Dora drew a chair to the table, and sat down beside it.

‘First,’ she said, ‘there is something I must ask you myself. Why have you all been keeping away from Hurst? Are you displeased with me about anything?’

‘No; no one is displeased with you. Say no more.’

‘No more! When I see Effie ill and unhappy, and know that she is being kept away from me, do you really imagine I can ask no more?’

‘Better not,’ said Di gloomily; ‘and so I warn you.’

‘I cannot take such a warning. What is the matter with Effie?’

Di’s brow grew still darker. ‘If you will know then—her heart has been broken!’

A quiver passed over Dora's face.

‘By whom?’ she said breathlessly.

‘By a most deceitful man,’ was the emphatic answer.

‘His name—tell me!’

‘Your brother Harold.’

‘That is not true!’ she cried, with flashing eyes. ‘How dare you say so?’

‘I say the truth, which, of course, you will never believe—but you chose to hear it! Now will you send Effie here?’

‘I will not! I will not leave this room until you tell me what makes you say such a thing. You are deceived—you must have been deceived!’

‘By my own eyes and ears, I suppose, and Malcolm the same, and Effie as well! Yes, we *have* been deceived; it is true—most true! For we believed Harold to be an honourable, upright man!’

‘He is!’ Anger and anguish struggled together in the sister's passionate tones. ‘He is the soul of honour! How can you doubt it? what can have happened? Tell me all—all!’

‘Listen, then, and I wish you had been there to see for yourself—to see him by her side for ever! He could not go out as much as the other men, his foot prevented it; but he never seemed to mind so long as he could be with her. They read together, talked together, were together for

hours and hours, driving, boating, sitting out of doors, it was always the same.'

'But he has known her so long—he thought—perhaps—he thought of her like a sister.'

'Am I blind?' replied Di, impatiently; 'is Malcolm blind? are we both babies to be mistaken in a man's manner like that? Should we ever have suffered it to go on if he had not shown every sign of becoming really attached to her? And if you think *we* could both be wrong, what do you think of Effie herself? Would she be mistaken in it too?'

'And did she think it?'

'Of course she did, as any girl must have thought! Not that she ever said a word, but you could see it in her face, in her eyes, in her manner. Malcolm was so happy, so certain—it was the very thing he wished! He felt as sure as I did that Harold would speak before he left us. Then came the visit to Abercairn. Harold said he had to go elsewhere on business, but we made sure he would return; we spoke of it as a settled thing. He went, and instead of coming back, he sent six lines of excuse, and that has been the end of it!'

'Oh! no, no! There must be some mistake!'

'Every word I have told you is true! If you want a proof of it, look at Effie! Is she a girl to be easily won, or to give her heart before it is asked for? And she did give it; she cared

for him, I am certain, a thousand times more than he deserved !’

The scene in the garden rushed back to Dora’s memory. She was dumb.

‘And if you want another proof,’ continued Di, bitterly, ‘look at Malcolm. It is breaking his heart as well as hers. He is wretched every time he looks at her, and thinks how she has been treated. And that it should have been Harold who has done this ! Harold—whom he trusted—whom he loved like a son already !’

She broke off. Marvellous sight ! Tears—real tears of pity and of pain—were standing in her eyes.

Dora’s anger melted before them like snow in summer. She sprang to Di with a kiss of reconciliation. ‘Dear Di,’ she cried, ‘don’t be so unhappy ; it must all come right, he can never be false or faithless.’

Di accepted the kiss, while she dashed the tears indignantly away. ‘It is hard on you, Dora,’ she answered, ‘to hear all this. Malcolm hoped you need never know it ; he begged me not to speak, and so we kept away—what else was there to be done ? But I knew it would never last ; I knew you would find out the truth in time.’

‘Not all the truth, it cannot be ! There must be a cause ; he must have imagined something ! Perhaps that you would not like it.’

‘Impossible ! Impossible to mistake Mal-

colm's manner like that! If he could have chosen out of the whole world he would have chosen Harold, and no man could ever have shown more kindness, more encouragement than he did!

'Yet,' said Dora, pondering, 'he may have thought—the difference of fortune——'

'Impossible!' broke in Di again. 'If she has money, he has a name, a reputation and position. No! men are not quite so modest as that!'

'He cannot have meant to do this thing. *That* is impossible!'

'Oh, no! Of course not!' Lady Campbell's lip curled. 'Men never *mean* to ruin a girl's life! All they mean is to amuse themselves for the moment and then go off—to forget her. That is what he has done, and a cowardly deed it was!'

'It would be, if he had done it.'

'And he *has* done it; he has never come near her again. You don't know mankind, Dora, nor what men are capable of. You have never been deceived!'

There was a pause before the steady answer came.

'I may not know mankind, but I know Harold. He never did a cowardly thing yet.'

'You can't get beyond that!'

'No, I cannot. If he could deceive her in that way, he would be another man; not—*my* Harold.'

‘Well, well!’ Di turned impatiently away. ‘There is no use going over it any more. I have told you—and now I must see Effie.’

‘For what?’

Lady Campbell began arranging her papers in silence.

‘Di, it is impossible that, after what you have told me, you can wish Mr. Grant to come here next week.’

‘If he cares to come, I am not going to prevent him.’

‘But if he comes, surely you know it is to see Effie?’

‘Well?’

‘You would not encourage him, or ask her to encourage him at such a time as this.’

Di’s lip curled again. ‘You are young in the ways of the world. Frances would tell you that it is “at such a time as this” that marriages are frequently arranged.’

‘*Arranged*—perhaps so!’

‘Well! arranged—encouraged—as you like to call it. Did you never hear that many a heart is caught on the rebound?’

‘Of all horrible sayings—’ cried Dora impetuously; then, checking herself, ‘Yes—caught, but how? As a little bird is caught when it flies from a storm and finds itself in a net. That would be Effie’s fate!’

Lady Campbell threw down her papers impatiently.

‘Now, Dora, be reasonable,’ she said, ‘and listen to me. I am no matchmaker, nor Malcolm either, but look at the true facts of the case. Here is Effie, wretched, spiritless, feeling herself abandoned and forsaken by a man who pretended to care for her. I know very well what Malcolm’s secret terror is—that it will prey upon her till she goes off into a decline like her mother, and unless something can be done to rouse her, I believe in my heart she may. And here is an honourable, good sort of man, who would make a very respectable husband, and who honestly likes her. Why is he not to have a chance of winning her? There is no reason to imagine he is coming here to propose, it is only just to pay a friendly visit—and why should he not?’

‘Because she is not in a state to be trusted; because she is wretched, and thinks she must be wretched for ever, and that it does not matter what becomes of her, and that she had better think only of pleasing other people. How do you know what he may not say to her, or what she may not promise in such a state of mind as that? Think of one word—spoken when she is too miserable to know what she is about—binding her for ever! What would she feel when she came to herself and saw all she had lost—liberty, love, self-respect—how could she bear life then?’

Di shook her head. 'If Effie were like some girls,' she answered, 'like yourself, Dora, I will say, all this might be very well. But she was not made to stand alone; someone to depend upon is a necessity for her. Remember what a burden Kildrummie is to her—and who is to manage that property now? Unless she marries all the trouble and responsibility will fall on Malcolm, which would be very bad for him; he is not up to so much business now. The world may say that we want this marriage because of Colin Grant's own property and position—and it will be all wrong, as usual. What we want, what *I* want, is to see her married to a steady, worthy man, who would take good care of herself and her money, and make her happy just as soon as she would let him.'

'He could never make her happy. Never!'

'Why not? Because he is not a Crimean—*hero*?'

The scornful tone brought a dark flush to Dora's cheek. 'No,' she said, struggling for calmness, 'but because there is no happiness in marriage without affection.'

'She would like him well enough when once they were married. Such girls as Effie always do.'

'Are you sure of that? Are you sure that the best never die, and make no sign?'

'Die—nonsense! They live, and get on very

comfortably! You will never persuade me that numbers of women are not very happy with men whom they were not a bit in love with when they married.'

'Perhaps so. It may be possible if they cared for no one else—though even then it must be a dreadful risk. But if they do care for another all the time, if they are crushed down with secret sorrow and have no heart to give, what right have they to take a place they cannot fill, to accept love and give nothing worth the name in return? Oh! if people have ever loved, how can they do this thing, and mock God and man?'

Di looked up wonderingly. Dora's eyes were widely opened with intensity of feeling, she seemed to be speaking rather to herself than to her hearer, as she went on:

'What can such marriages bring but suffering? They cannot be blessed; no life can be blessed that begins with a falsehood. Yet people make them, and make their children make them—ruining their lives because their own were ruined first!'

'Thanks—for your good opinion of Malcolm and of me!'

'Not you—no! I don't believe it! You want her to be happy—you will help her and save her, you will keep her from ruining her own life

when she is so weak—so sad ! Dear Di, say you will !’

Di turned away, but it was difficult to shut out the sound of those pleading tones, and the sight of those constraining eyes. There was silence in the room for some moments, and when she spoke again her tone had changed. ‘What is it you want to have done then ?’ she said.

‘I want you to do nothing, to attempt nothing which might make her act hastily. How can a real attachment be changed like that ? If you bring Mr. Grant here so quickly what time has she had—how can she have forgotten——’

She ceased. Never had Harold’s image risen up before her eyes with such mingled throbs of pride and pain.

‘And then,’ said Di, ‘see her drooping away—and know that she is dwelling day and night upon the past ; and when he sails for India—see her dying outright perhaps !’

‘Whether she lives or dies,’ answered Dora in a low voice, ‘at least so long as she lives she will not have to feel that every thought of her heart is a sin.’

Di turned away in silence, snatched up a pen, wrote rapidly for a couple of minutes, and threw her unsealed letter across the table. ‘Take it away,’ she said, ‘I have done with it. The responsibility is yours now.’

Dora's hands trembled as she took up the letter. 'You will never be sorry,' was all she could find voice to whisper, as she left the room, and returning to Effie, placed in her hands the half-dozen lines which informed Mr. Grant that, owing to unsettled plans, Lady Campbell 'regretted not being able to have the pleasure of seeing him again at the Hanger.'

'Is it true?' said Effie wonderingly.

'Yes, he is not coming.'

'Then you have done it, Dora. Nobody else could.' A deep breath of relief followed the words.

'Dear Effie, you can be at peace now. Rest and grow strong.'

They parted with a silent embrace, for Dora dared not stay. There could be no peace for her own mind, not even when her own hands had sent away that hardly-won letter.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SHE had conquered, but a victory may be dearly bought. Dora's cost her a sleepless night. Yet its long and feverish hours were too short to decide the painful questions crowding upon her mind.

How came Harold to have been so much misapprehended? For that he could ever have been selfish and heartless was of all things the most incredible. She tried to recall his looks and manners on returning from Scotland, with all that he had said concerning the Grants and Effie, but failed to discover any sign of personal interest either in his light and careless words then, or in those he had spoken to Effie herself in Miss Goode's garden. Surely Di and Sir Malcolm had been all along deceived! Their own wishes had misled them; they had mistaken mere friendliness for a stronger feeling. But, often as these convictions gathered strength within her, a fresh thought would dispel them all. Di might err, Malcolm might err, but would Effie, the delicate, reserved Effie, so greatly err as to give her whole heart and trust to one

who had never shown that he was seeking it? This Dora knew not how to credit; it was as contrary to the nature of things as that Harold should be false. And yet—Effie was young—had not the young made such mistakes before? A blush covered her cheeks as her thoughts flew back to a long past summer. Was Glenarchie always to be a fatal place, doomed to bring blindness upon simple girls who wandered over its mountains? Or was it possible that another besides Effie was grieving now? Had Harold, the proud and the critical, learned to love at last? She wished, she longed, but scarcely dared to hope it.

In a weary sea of doubt and distress her mind tossed backward and forward all night, and all the following day, when prolonged thought could bring nothing but fresh perplexity. For now the question arose, what ought her own conduct towards Harold to be? His regiment was quartered in too distant a county for any frequent meetings to be possible, but Christmas would bring him home—could she see him then and be utterly silent? Perhaps a word from her might make some truth rise to his lips, and, if this were possible, how should she be excused from speaking it? But no, it could not be, for honour to Effie must always seal her own.

When she lay down again that night, it was

with a head and heart even more more tired and heavy than before, and with as little hope of rest. But worn-out nature asserted her rights; she slept long, and when in the first moments of waking all the past returned to her remembrance, a ray of light had fallen upon it, and she saw without a doubt the one simple thing to be done. That day she wrote to Harold a letter which contained these words: 'Mr. Grant has written to Di to offer himself at the Hanger again. but has been declined by Effie's wish. Evidently there is no desire on her part to join Kildrummie and Abercairn. I tell you this in confidence, because you mentioned the subject yourself in August.'

Four days passed with no intercourse between the Hanger and the Grange, excepting a visit on the third from Sir Philip, who brought an invitation to dinner for the following evening, with a kind reproach to Dora for having been such an absentee of late. 'If you could see poor Effie now,' he said, 'I am sure you would let her have your cheerful company to brighten her up. She is evidently out of health. I persuaded Di and Malcolm to let Lister see her yesterday. He prescribes rest, fresh air, and tonics. But your company would be as good as any tonic.'

Dora wished she could have agreed with him; it was most painful to be forced upon a belief

that the very opposite was the truth, for how could the sister fail to recall the brother to Effie's mind? On this account she had kept away, and never had she gone so unwillingly along the well-known road as on the following night, feeling that it must be absolutely impossible to speak to anyone of the name of Campbell without sensations of misery.

Fate, however, is sometimes kinder than fear—the subject then possessing her thoughts, to the exclusion of any other, was almost forgotten within three minutes of her entering the house. News had come that morning to the Hanger—news so great as to fill every mind and open nearly every mouth in the eagerness of its recital. All other thoughts were driven away before this one surprising fact. The old house was to have a new mistress—Colonel Merivale was engaged to be married!

The intelligence was equally welcome and astonishing. No one had dreamt that Phil in going to Ireland was destined there to find the bride whom some had begun to despair of his ever bringing home at all; and no one, not even Emmeline, could find any fault with the choice he had made—no one, that is to say, who was disposed to make their opinion public; and Sir Philip had been taciturn from the first moment of receiving his son's announcement.

It had been brief, but Phil was not a great

scribe, nor was his the only letter. All the advantages of the marriage—a marriage which might truly be termed ‘an alliance’—were set forth at length by Lady Barrymore’s pen. In bringing Lady Cecilia Langley, daughter to the Earl of Archdale, home as his bride, her brother would be acting in a manner worthy of the heir of the Hanger. Less than three weeks spent together beneath the roof of Barrymore Castle and the presiding eye of its mistress had been sufficient to produce this most auspicious event. Certainly Frances had good reason to be proud of herself, and every line of her letter spoke a sense of triumphant success. That Phil should marry had long been the wish of the family, and that he should marry so unexceptionally was most gratifying; and Uncle John’s spontaneous burst, ‘Well, Frances *is* a clever woman!’ expressed the secret thought of all.

The lady was not unknown, nor was the Hanger unknown to her. She had made its acquaintance when Di was married, on which occasion she had been amongst the bridesmaids, being the very Lady Cecilia for whom Phil had once done Dora the honour of mistaking her. She had been met in London for many a season past; Charlie recalled brothers at Eton, and Sir Philip was assured that he must certainly have known her father formerly, at which Sir Philip merely shook his head. She was pronounced by

Lina and Di to be an agreeable woman, good-looking enough, and of a suitable age, one who had gone everywhere, seen everything, and might be confidently relied upon always to keep Phil 'going.' Sir Philip glanced down the table, and thought that he could have chosen another who might have been relied on to keep him quietly at home. But he endured all the congratulations and speculations with outward serenity, and kept his real sentiments in reserve.

The mid-day post had brought the great intelligence; and Charlie, who had been out shooting, heard it only just before dinner. To his ear his father's voice and air betrayed more dissatisfaction than his words expressed, and when, on going upstairs, he lingered with him for a while before parting for the night, he found that his surmise had been correct.

'Shut the door,' said Sir Philip with impatient weariness; and then, throwing himself down upon a chair, he seemed for a time inclined to say no more.

'You don't dislike this engagement, father, I hope?' said Charlie.

'My opinion has not been asked,' was the cold reply. 'It is Frances who has made this match.'

'Well, yes; but'—Charlie smiled—'Phil is such a lazy old boy that I really don't think he would ever have done it without help from some-

one ; and we must all be delighted that he should marry at last.'

'Frances was perfectly well aware,' his father continued, 'when she wrote that letter, that I should feel anything but delight.'

'Really? Then I am afraid you wished for something different?'

'I most certainly did.' Sir Philip paused. It was not pleasant to own to a defeated scheme, but he was irritated and needed a confidant. To confide in Charlie was becoming a settled habit, and in half a minute he went on, 'The wife on whom *my* wishes had been fixed would have been found much nearer home.'

'Indeed.' Charlie's thoughts began running rapidly over the families of their country neighbours.

'Certainly.' Sir Philip paused again, looking steadily in his son's face. 'What should you have thought of Dora?' he asked.

'How? I don't understand.'

'As a sister. How would you have liked her?'

'*A sister!*' Charlie stopped—speechless.

His father made an impatient gesture. 'Young men are blind, I think. One lives near her for years, yet goes off to choose a wife at a distance ; another is astonished that she should ever have been thought of. Yet where would you find anybody more worthy?'

No answer came, but Sir Philip, more intent

on expressing his own feelings than on hearing other people's, continued his discourse.

‘I shall be surprised indeed if Lady Cecilia can rival Dora in personal beauty alone, not to speak of higher qualities. For the rest, Dora is a lady, and my son's wife needs no other distinction.’

Charlie's cheeks were burning, he breathed fast. But blindness is not confined to the young. Sir Philip saw in his son's looks merely the natural effect of extreme surprise.

‘Frances,’ he went on, ‘was perfectly well aware of my wishes, though she has chosen to ignore them now. It was but the other day that I made them known to her, but neither they nor Dora were worth remembering, as it would appear!’

‘Did anyone else know?’ gasped Charlie.

‘Your uncle only. I mentioned my wishes to him in the summer.’ Sir Philip proceeded to relate the drift of their conversation, while Charlie, listening with an averted face, regained at last composure enough to perceive that the idea had existed in the speaker's mind alone. With this conviction came other feelings. How great a tribute was his father now paying to one at whose feet Charlie himself would have laid a kingdom, had it been his to offer, and have thought it honoured by her acceptance. Sir Philip, then, had also discerned her worth; he

had discarded old prejudices in favour of rank and station for the sake of one whose value outweighed them all! Never had the father drawn the son's heart so closely to his own as by this closing sentence: 'Could I have chosen, I would have wished Dora to be my daughter rather than any other woman on earth.'

'Yes, father—I understand.'

The warm young hand was laid upon the older one, outstretched upon the arm of the chair. Sir Philip returned the momentary pressure, well pleased to believe that his sentiments had been shared.

'When I think of your mother, my dear boy, and how she loved her, who else can ever seem so fit to come among us, and take her sacred place? Who is there indeed like Dora?'

'No one,' was the low answer.

'But Frances has chosen to make it impossible, and for this we are asked to rejoice! Well—may Philip's wife be but half as worthy, and he will not be an unfortunate man!'

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE week that elapsed before Philip Merivale appeared at home again restored to his father most of the equanimity which had been overset by the first intelligence of his son's engagement. His own private schemes having been defeated, he was wise enough to make the best of things as they were, and to fall in readily with the plans which Colonel Merivale laid before him—namely that he should leave the army, and that the Hanger should henceforth be the principal home of himself and his wife, their separate establishment to be a London house only. Sir Philip agreed to both parts of the scheme. The house in town, which had been unoccupied by any of the family for the last ten years, he was now willing to make over to their use, while the Hanger would receive them during the autumn and winter months.

Phil was in good spirits, ready to be congratulated, and not sorry to be encouraged by the assurances of his family that he had done perfectly right, and that Lady Cecilia would

make him an excellent wife ; a point on which he appeared to be hopeful, yet not so absolutely certain as to make it appear probable that she would ever have attained that situation but for a helping hand behind the scenes. Nothing, however, was wanting on the part of others to assist him in believing himself to be the most fortunate of men, but Di gave Frances credit for her usual prudence, when she read her sister's earnest injunctions that the engagement must be as short as possible, and Phil's future irrevocably fixed before he had time to regret the sweets of liberty.

It was now the middle of November, and the beginning of January would not be too soon for the wedding ; indeed, Frances would have wished to name an earlier date, could lawyers and dress-makers have been left out of the question. Powerful also as her influence over the whole affair had been, the naming of the wedding-day had not absolutely been left to her. The bride could exert a will of her own. She intended to be married in London, and to proceed at once to Italy. Phil had already heard the last decision, and was ready to submit to the inevitable. He had also been made aware that his presence would shortly be required in London, whither the bride-elect and her mother must proceed to order wedding-clothes, and the Campbells

found that their house and themselves were being reckoned on for receiving these visitors, as Lord Archdale's London house was closed for the winter. Sir Malcolm was never backward in hospitality, and Di was equally willing to welcome Phil's future wife, the only question being, what was to become of Effie? It was, however, one that admitted of little discussion, since Mr. Lister's orders were imperative. Rest, quiet, and as much fresh air as possible she must have, and as none of these could just now be ensured in Grosvenor Square, she must remain with the children at the Hanger.

Lina was fully determined to go to London for the fortnight that Lady Archdale and her daughter were to be there, and to take her husband with her. If Malcolm and Di were wanted to welcome their future sister-in-law, evidently she, the elder sister of the two, could never be excused for remaining away. Charlie would by that time be again in town, and Sir Philip was persuaded to promise that he would spend a day or two there also to meet the expected guests. Effie was, therefore, likely to have too much, rather than too little, quiet, and when this general departure was decided upon, Di found herself obliged to have recourse to the usual remedy, and appeal to Dora to keep her company. It was not what she would have chosen

just now, but she knew not how to avoid it, and Dora, she felt, might be trusted as one who could be silent in season.

In the general excitement and interest which the recent announcement had caused in the family circle, Effie's languor and inclination for solitude had been allowed to pass unnoticed, and before long the rest had departed, and Dora had arrived from Hurst. Quiet was acknowledged to be the best thing for Effie now, and the only interruptions to the quiet that reigned in the rooms which the two friends occupied were caused by occasional inroads of the nursery party, headed by Angus the less, whose strength and spirits were becoming too overpowering for his French *bonne* to contend against. They never seemed to do Effie any harm; her gentle tones were sometimes attended to when the shriller accents of Mademoiselle Adèle had no chance of being heard, and Dora often brought the little boy into the room to be taught, or played with, or coaxed into quietness over a picture book. Such a peaceful employment, however, could never captivate Master Angus for long—even the fiercest warrior on the most prancing steed was apt to weary at the end of three minutes.

‘What’s that you’re doing now, sister?’ he called out one morning from the hearthrug,

where he was kicking his heels in the air for want of any better amusement.

‘Writing to mamma, Gussie dear,’ she answered; ‘shall I send your love?’

Gussie kicked away in contemptuous silence. ‘And you,’ he said presently, looking at Dora, ‘are you writing, too? Is it to the Captain?’

It was, and she was obliged to say so.

‘*Then* you may send my love.’

No answer was returned, and Gussie, after a few moments of abstraction, got up and pulled at Effie’s arm.

‘Sister, rule me some lines.’

‘To write to mamma?’ asked Effie, as she obediently put away her own letter, to take up a pencil and ruler.

‘No. To the Captain. To go in Cousin Dora’s.’

Effie’s hand rested motionless on the sheet of paper she had drawn towards her.

‘How slow you are!’ shouted he; ‘why don’t you begin? Not like that!’ as she hastily began to rule. ‘Silly sister! You *know* I can’t write on single lines.’

Effie took another sheet, ruled it, and gave it to the little boy in silence. For a time his tongue was quiet, or, at any rate, differently employed, its little rosy tip curling in and out between the parted lips, first on one side and

then on the other, all desire for speech forgotten in the opening toils of composition. But not for long could such a blissful state of things endure; and before two sides of paper were fully covered the young author leant back in his chair with a deep sigh, and pushed the half-written letter towards his sister.

‘There,’ he said. ‘You finish.’

She hurriedly pushed it back again with a flush on her cheek.

‘No, Gussie. I am busy.’

Again he demanded help, but again in vain. A proposal from Dora that he should bring it to her was instantly rejected. ‘Sister *always* finished his letters—he wouldn’t let nobody else’

‘I am busy,’ she repeated. ‘Don’t tease me, Gussie.’

‘You’re not busy; you’re very cross! You’re not writing—nor doing nothing now.’ He tried to force the pen into her hand, but it dropped on the paper.

‘There,’ cried Gussie, ‘there’s a blot, and you made it. I’ll write and tell the Captain you did, and how cross you are.’

‘Gussie—don’t!’ Effie started up and hurried from the room, but not soon enough to escape detection. The little boy sat gazing after her with round eyes and open mouth.

‘Sister—*crying*! What’s that for?’

‘Gussie, come here,’ said Dora.

He came, a little abashed.

‘It is very wrong to call poor sister cross. She is not cross at all; but she is not well. Don’t you know Mr. Lister has to come and see her to try to make her better? But we mustn’t tease her and tire her, or she cannot get well.’

Gussie hung his head, and, turning away, resumed the labours of the pen in silence. ‘There,’ he said presently, thrusting a curious-looking manuscript into Dora’s hand; ‘that’s for the Captain.’

She read as follows:—

‘deare Capten,—i hope you are Quit well. grandpapa as gon to London with Uncel fill. he is goin to be marred to lady cecilar. then she will be ant sesiliar. Ples rumembere my Tiger. i ask Sister to finish this, but she cryd an went away. But cousen dora says she isn t Cros, only Ill an as the Doctor.

‘From youre freind,

‘ANGUS CAMBEL.’

‘Will it do?’ asked the anxious author.

‘I—don’t know, Gussie.’

‘But won’t it do? What won’t it do for?’

There was a long pause.

‘I *can’t* write no better,’ said Gussie piteously.

Dora smiled, and, stooping, kissed the little wrinkled brow.

‘No, Gussie dear—and it will do. The letter shall go.’

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE November sunshine fell with a faint attempt at brightness into the old schoolroom at the Grange, where Dora and Effie sat by the fireside. A day at home was necessary now and then to the former, that affairs both in the house and the village might be attended to, and she had persuaded her companion to accompany her, and to help her in copying lists of winter clothing for the school children at Hurst. The lists were finished now, and Effie was leaning back in her chair slowly winding a tangled skein of wool which Dora had committed to her care, when the latter suddenly raised her head from the account books before her.

‘Who went by the window just now?’ she asked.

‘Was it anyone? The gardener, perhaps,’ said Effie listlessly.

For a few moments there was silence; then came a sound in the hall—a step. Dora’s head was raised again. The steps approached nearer—the door opened—Harold entered the room.

Effie sprang up, sat down again, broke her

wool, then snatched up the end and began winding away as though her life depended upon it.

‘Harry!’ said his sister, as she welcomed him, ‘you never said you were coming.’

‘No—I could not tell. How do you do, Miss Campbell? I—hope—you are better.’

‘Oh! yes—quite—much—thank you.’

Crimsoning all over, Effie gave for one moment a trembling hand; then, instantly sitting down again, endeavoured to go on winding as before. Why did such sudden things happen? Why did the wool keep breaking in such an extraordinary way? Why did Captain Vaughan stand looking at her without saying a word? Why did nobody speak?

‘That seems to be very bad wool,’ she heard pronounced at last in a grave, deliberate voice.

She started like a frightened hare. ‘Oh, no, it isn’t—at least—it’s very good, thank you.’

Captain Vaughan turned away. When she could hear anything again, he was speaking to Dora about the reason of his visit. He had wanted to see his uncle. ‘I imagined you were at the Hanger,’ he said.

‘So I am, but we have come over for a few hours, and find that Uncle John has gone to Compton. How did you arrive so early?’

‘I was in London last night.’

‘And you can stay here to-night?’

‘I—don’t know.’ He began moving round

the room, until he once more stood still by Effie's side.

'Then you have not gone back to London?' he said.

'No, I have not—I mean—none of us have. They are coming down again.'

He sat down and appeared to be lost in contemplation of the slender fingers moving to and fro with nervous haste among the bright blue coils.

'Are you getting better now?'

It was the tone rather than the words that brought back the deep blush to her cheeks, while she assured him breathlessly that she had not been ill—that she was much better.

Another moment of silence and Harold started up. 'I must go,' he said.

'Where must you go?' asked Dora.

'Oh!—to see Goody.'

'You need not do that. I have just sent down to ask her to come up to luncheon.'

'Have you? Where's Sultan? I've not seen him yet,' and he hurried away.

Dora's head was bent again over her book. Like a statue she sat for full two minutes, till she heard her name faintly called.

'Yes, dear,' she answered.

'Can I go home?'

'Go home at once? Now?'

'Yes, please, I would rather go now.'

‘But I am afraid you cannot. I have sent the pony-carriage into Arnborough to do some commissions, and Uncle John has taken the carriage and the coachman.’

‘Then I will walk—I should like to walk,’ said poor Effie, who had not walked a mile for the last month.

‘My dearest Effie, what are you dreaming of?’

‘But you must want to see him alone, of course ; and, indeed, I would rather go.’

‘I do want to see him,’ said Dora with energy, as she rose and began tying on the hat and cloak lying on a chair beside her. ‘I am going to him in the garden now, and we can talk there, and then Goody will come, and we will have luncheon, and after that you shall go home whenever you please.’

Effie sank back again in silence, and Dora ran out into the garden across the lawn, and down the leaf-strewn wood walks, a newly born resolution shining in her eyes. The last five minutes had brought revelations with them, and doubt and hesitation were scattered to the winds. At the entrance of a rustic arbour she found Harold leaning against its doorway with folded arms, his hat drawn over his brows. He looked up at her approach.

‘Ah ! it is you ?’ said he.

‘Yes.’ She put her arm in his, and drew

him inside. 'I want to ask about your foot. Did you come up to London to see the surgeon?'

'I did see him on my way here.'

'Well?' She looked in his face. It was gloom itself.

'I am good for nothing—if that is what you want to know.'

'Harry!'

'Too true,' he said bitterly, twirling his moustache and looking away.

'How?—why?'

'There has been inflammation going on for some time, and now there is contraction. He told me to rest it altogether some time ago, and I've done so; but it's no go.'

'Oh, Harry! What brought it on? Was it the fall over the fence?'

'He supposes that set it up.'

'On such a day to have injured yourself again! And you have suffered, I am sure, much more than you have told us; I can see it in your face.'

He made no answer.

'But, oh!' and a flash of light darted into Dora's soul; 'then you cannot go to India?'

'At which you rejoice, no doubt. No; as I said, I am good for nothing now.'

She clasped her hands round his arm. 'Dearest Harry, you are good for me—always.'

'To be sure you used to wish to have a

cripple returned on your hands. You've got him now, and no mistake.'

'I can never have too much of him—never!'

'It's rather a sudden pull up, though,' said he, looking away again.

'Yes; but they will give you more sick leave, of course.'

'I dare say. I may go on being a useless encumbrance on my country for some time longer, no doubt; or I may retire now, and worry my friends as an idle beggar with nothing to do to the end of the chapter. That's about the choice, I take it.'

'No, indeed!' and she looked at him with shining, earnest eyes, 'I do not see why you should not have a most useful, happy life before you, even if you leave the army.'

'Don't you? Well—never mind.'

'But then,' she went on steadily, 'you must not turn away from happiness when it comes near you.'

'I don't know what you mean!' A dark red flush was mounting on his face.

'Harry, I have learnt something. I have learnt what it is that would make you happy.'

'You are talking of what you don't understand,' he said, in tones half fierce, half stifled.

She put her hand on his arm again. 'Harry, you will not be proud—hard? You will think of another as well as of yourself?'

He shook off the hand impatiently. 'What do you mean? I am nothing to anyone—nothing! And I do not seek, I do not choose to be anything!'

'How can you tell what you are unless you try to find out?'

'I!' He laughed scornfully. 'Look at me; see what I am! A cripple, perhaps for life; a poor man without even a profession now; a useless, disabled soldier, yet fit for nothing else—a fine treasure to offer, certainly!'

'Then it is just as I thought,' she cried; 'it is your pride!'

'Yes; thank Heaven, I *have* pride enough not to press such a useless encumbrance on—anyone who has everything that I have not!'

Dora's eyes met his with a grave, soft look. 'So that is man's pride,' she said. 'Must he always be first in everything—even in giving?'

Harold drew himself up to his full height, folded his arms once more, and leant back against the wall of the little summer-house. 'It is a pride,' he said, 'which any man who has a spark of generosity in him would be ashamed *not* to have.'

'So man thinks, and thinks it is the highest kind. But what is a woman's pride? Never to reckon the less or the more—to look upon what she *has* as nothing in comparison with what she *is*—to feel that when she gives herself, for life, it

is so great a gift that all other things are but as dust in the balance, not worthy to be named or remembered. That is a woman's pride !'

He did not stir a finger.

'And her joy—Harry, do you know what that is? To help him most when he needs her most—to comfort, to watch, to wait, to be ready even to bless the weakness that lets her serve him. That is a woman's joy !'

Harold set his teeth firmly together. She waited, her glowing eyes fixed upon his face. At last he spoke, as coldly as before : 'It is absolutely impossible. It would be all gain to me, all loss to her.'

'Loss ! Loss—when she would gain you ! Oh, my dearest Harry, you are as much too humble as you are too proud !'

'An heiress, such as she is, should look much higher ; her friends must expect much more for her than a half-pay officer, such as I shall be now.'

'That wretched money !' cried Dora indignantly. 'How can you—what right have you to dwell upon that, as if it were the great thing in her life ? It is unworthy of you, and an insult to her ! What does she care for it ? How much happiness has it brought her ? Has it ever been anything but a painful burden ? Does she think the better of herself because she has it ? You know she does not ; you know she is as far from

such feelings as a little child could be. Her heart is set on other things.'

'I know.' For the first time his voice was softened. He bowed his head and unclasped his arms.

'Then, if you know it, why do you judge her as if she were proud and worldly?'

'I? Good heavens—no! But there are many fellows more fit, more worthy than I am of what she is.'

'But if she does not think so?'

'What can you mean?' The fierceness seemed to be returning to his voice as he suddenly faced her.

'I do not know. I was not at Glenarchie. But you were with her there for a long time this summer.'

'But she does not—she has not——' His gleaming eyes were finishing the question he could not ask.

'She has never mentioned your name to me since she returned. Nor I to her.'

'Then what do you mean—how can you tell——' He stopped again.

'I cannot tell you anything—from her. But I want you to look back, to reflect whether you never gave her cause to suppose that you would ask—what I cannot ask her. If she did not expect it others did.'

'Others!'

‘Yes ; and I can tell you now that if you had spoken, if you had been able to win her, it would have given her father the greatest pleasure.’

Harold turned abruptly away, and leant against the little window looking out into the wood.

‘It is not too late,’ she said, drawing nearer to him, ‘not too late yet. I would not urge it because others wish it, nor because I wish it. I would never urge it, unless I believed that your own heart was speaking to you ! But if it is, oh ! dearest Harry, listen to it now, and do not let a false honour, a mistaken pride, ruin the happiness of—perhaps two lives.’

Another moment, and the dead leaves rustled beside him. Dora was gone.

When she opened the door of the schoolroom once more, Effie started up from the same posture in which she had left her, returning to her work with an unconscious sigh. Dora herself returned to her place, but it was vain even to pretend to open her books. She could but sit looking out of the window.

Presently, in a voice so cold and guarded that it sounded most unlike her own, Effie spoke.

‘I hope you find your brother’s foot is better ?’

‘It is not any better. It is worse.’

‘Worse ?’

‘Yes.’

‘I am sorry. What made it worse?’

‘Do you remember his fall over the sunk fence at the Hanger?’

‘Oh! yes.’

‘They say it was that; he must have twisted it. It has been very much worse lately.’

‘That fall! That day!’

The soft rose colour came slowly creeping over Effie’s white cheeks. Did she remember her own icy answer and Harold’s instant recoil? Her eyelids dropped, while their long dark lashes quivered beneath the burden that was gathering on them. Presently her head was quickly raised, but only to be bent lower than before. Once more Captain Vaughan was entering the room. He walked to the fire, stirred the smouldering logs, then leant upon the high mantelpiece, turning his face away. Dora rose and came to him.

‘Sit down, Harry. You must rest your foot now.’

He took an arm-chair in silence. She knelt beside him to look for a footstool.

‘I have been telling Effie how bad it is, but I did not tell her one thing—that you cannot go to India now.’

‘Not go?—oh!’ Effie had turned in a moment with a glow on her cheeks, the dew still hanging on her lashes.

He bent towards her. 'No. Are you glad?'

Dora heard the words, the tone, and in two seconds was out once more among the garden's brown and yellow walks. She would not wait for another look, or she might have seen two strong brown hands held out, and the little white ones laid in them—at rest for ever. So, within the walls of his childhood's home, Harold Vaughan's happy lot was sealed for life.

‘Don't you delude yourself though,’ said Harry, shaking his head at his sister, an hour later, ‘into supposing that *you* had anything to do with it.’

She looked in his face, laughing. ‘I dare say not, Harry; I dare say it would all have happened just the same if I had never given it a single thought.’

‘To be sure! It wasn't you a bit! It was that little wretch—that was what I couldn't bear,—“only Ill an as the Doctor”! Oh! Dormouse, Dormouse, you were right, after all! She says she likes me all the better because I've only one foot left to stand upon!’

CHAPTER XXXVII.

‘When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married.’—MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

SIR MALCOLM CAMPBELL’S opinion of one of his fellow-creatures was destined to undergo a complete transformation that very evening. While he thought of Harold Vaughan as having trifled with the happiness of his daughter, no number of medals or swords of honour could make him anything but a base and cowardly knight at heart. But no sooner did this recreant knight, appearing before him in his own library in Grosvenor Square, with neither shame nor guilt written on his countenance, boldly demand the hand of that daughter, than Sir Malcolm was ready to clasp him to his heart. It was in vain that the suitor prefaced the demand with an unvarnished statement as to his own broken health and altered prospects. The words, ‘And yet, Sir Malcolm, I am going to ask if you will accept me as a son-in-law,’ were scarcely out of Harold’s mouth before his right hand was caught and warmly pressed, and when the declaration followed that this request would have been made earlier had it not

been for a conviction that another wooer must be preferred by all, both right hand and left hand seemed in some danger of being shaken off, so impossible was it for Sir Malcolm adequately to express his joy and willingness to accept such a son-in-law before any other which the world could offer him, while he regretted nothing but that mistaken modesty to which all the past perplexity and distress was due. Here the two were by no means agreed—Harold maintaining that his own doubts had been not only natural but inevitable, Sir Malcolm asserting that they had been so unreasonable as to be past all power of divining, the position he had won for himself being such that any family in England might feel itself honoured in receiving him. As to Di—Harold took his own short method of reconciliation in that quarter, assuring her that nothing but the dread of such a step-mother-in-law had prevented him from speaking months before!

Harold Vaughan's fortunate star had not deserted him. He seemed born for conquest both in war and in peace. Yet he was in truth the conquered rather than the conqueror now; for it was his own proud spirit and determined will that had yielded at last beneath the might of a gentle nature and the glance of a soft grey eye. Long ago that gentleness had made its first impression on the apparently impassive, boyish heart, when she had been small, weak, and lonely,

and he in his young, manly strength had felt an irresistible impulse to pity and protect her. Henceforward, among all his protestations against young ladies in general, there had been an unspoken exception in favour of *one*, hiding in a corner of his heart. But as time passed on this very feeling produced an exactly opposite course of conduct from that which might at the beginning have been supposed probable. He became an officer; he heard the language of the world and of the mess-room; he mixed with men who made no secret of their conviction that heiresses should be marked down and sought out as though they were to be—like some higher sorts of game—secured by careful stalking. When his own connection with Miss Campbell, the heiress of Kildrummie, became known, he received several well-meant exhortations ‘not to let the grass grow under his feet,’ ‘to go in and win.’ Harold did not knock the speakers’ teeth down their throats; he contented himself with grinding his own in private, as he registered many a secret vow that never should any power on earth make him appear in that contemptible character, a fortune-hunter. He returned from his campaign strong in this resolve. Effie would be for him an object to be avoided, not to be sought. He saw her again, still with touches of loneliness and sadness, but fairer, far fairer than before, and instinct warned him that defensive armour would

be needed here. Satire and criticism should be his weapons; with these he could easily raise a barrier between them. But a desire for satire and criticism dwelt only on the surface, not in the depths of Harold's nature, and an unsuspected force was soon wresting these weapons from his grasp—that same patient gentleness which years before had conquered the boy's rough shyness when he had raised his little victim from the ground, and then knelt down beside her, begging for pardon with sudden self-reproach.

Besides, there were the influences of home, with its strong associations, and the natural chivalry of a brave man, all making it impossible long to keep up even the semblance of cold cynicism towards such a being as Effie. Moreover, Di occasionally tyrannised, or let other people tyrannise, over her. So Harold quickly decided—a brotherly friend was evidently needed to protect her, and this friend he would be. In such a state of mind he had started for Glenarchie, and if it were destined not to last, if there were a magic power in the moors and mountains, under whose influence cool friendship was soon developing into a different stage, Harold had fallen beneath the spell before he knew of its existence or had learnt to fear its force.

With a start he awoke at last, roused by the approach of one whom he chose, in a perverse

self-tormenting mood, to regard as chosen by the family to be Effie's future husband. A light observation of Di's, in which she pointed out Mr. Grant's attention to her step-daughter, encouraged this belief. Di had made it with a very different view—that of inducing Harold to declare his own attachment. Taking it in a totally opposite sense, he recalled his former resolutions, summoned past pride to his aid, and decided at once, with stern self-command, that his own feelings must be buried in absolute silence.

Had nature but bestowed on him a little more vanity and a little less pride, it might have occurred to him to consider whether such behaviour might not affect the happiness of more than himself. But in no such happy hope did he for a moment indulge. Absorbed by his own struggles and suffering, he had started for the south, believing in all sincerity—after the fashion of blind man—that the suffering had fallen upon himself alone. The change which he could not help seeing in Sir Malcolm's manner, and even in Effie's when they met again, was ascribed by his haughty sensitiveness to a cause exactly the reverse of the truth. They had read his secret feelings, and wished to discourage them—they need not fear, he would certainly trouble them no more!

Such a frame of mind as he carried back on rejoining his regiment was not likely to produce either health or happiness. He had been earnestly

employed in promoting the successful attachment of a friend, and had now nothing to do but to meditate on the difference between that friend's situation and his own ; while he waited in daily expectation of hearing the announcement of Effie's engagement to Colin Grant. Dora's positive assurance that such an engagement would not take place was the first thing that shook this persuasion. He might tell himself over and over again that it was nothing to him, he might refrain from alluding to it when writing to his sister—the one question—could he have been mistaken in expecting it—was never absent from his thoughts.

Suddenly another image was brought before him—Effie ill—Effie unhappy ! Was he no better than a barbarian, that the thought of her suffering should be making his heart beat with some strange undefinable hope ? But of what was he dreaming ? Was there the smallest reason to connect her illness and unhappiness with his own ? None whatever—not the smallest ! Why then were his stern resolutions melting away like snow before a thaw ? This was a question impossible to be answered until he had once more seen Effie, until his own eyes should have revealed to him something of her present state. Inaction and ignorance could no longer be endured—to Hurst he must at all events go, even if he went no further. What followed is

already known—and how good angels met him on the road.

For the third time within three months did the neighbourhood find itself called upon for congratulations and good wishes, to be uttered with various degrees of enthusiasm. Miss Waller was a recent and Mr. Grey a future neighbour only, and the interest excited by their intended marriage rested mainly on the information—soon gathered from Uncle John—as to the part which his two nephews had borne in the affair. Next had come the announcement, long looked for and long delayed, that the heir of the Hanger was at length going to take to himself a wife. But, important to the future welfare of society at large as this event might be, yet in respect of the immediate advantages of furnishing conversation and touching the imagination, it must certainly yield the palm to the last of the three engagements—to youth and beauty, family and fame, a fair heiress and a wounded hero!

Nothing, it must be owned, either of romance or of reality was wanting to make this an ideal engagement; and, while some had prophesied it long ago, and others had declared that anything so obvious could never take place—while some lamented that such an officer should be lost to the army, and others rejoiced that a useful country gentleman's life was now opening before him—all agreed in the unanimous verdict that

never had the brave more truly deserved and honourably won the fair.

And what of the feelings and the utterances of those most nearly concerned with the two who, in making each other happy, had shed happiness all around them?

On the second day after the engagement had been formed Dora and Effie sat together in the Oak room at the Hanger. That morning Harold had been obliged, for the last time, to rejoin his regiment. When he came among them again it would be as a free man, and until that happy hour should arrive Effie's chief consolation must be in pouring out in the ears of his sister—soon to be her own in name as well as in heart—all the sorrows, the perplexities, and despair of the past few months, and all the perfect, undeserved blessedness now filling her soul in their place. Finally, a treasure, too sacred for any other eyes but Dora's, was unfolded to her view—no less a one than the little nosegay prepared by herself on the night of the dinner party.

‘He kept it always,’ she whispered. ‘He says he should have kept it all his life.’

‘And we thought him such a misanthrope,’ cried Dora, ‘that night above all!’

‘Yes. Oh! how little I knew—but how could anyone know what he really is? Only you, Dora—and yet you don't hate me, and

think me unfit and unworthy, as you must know I am !’

‘What does he think himself?’ said Dora, smiling, as she lifted up the face beside her.

‘Oh!’—the face went down again with a sudden blush—‘he is so much too good to me—but what is that?’ and Effie sprang up. ‘He can’t have come’—she rushed to the opening door—‘ah! no—not.’

‘*Not*—as you say,’ said a laughing voice. ‘I’m very sorry to be a disappointment, but still—may I have a kiss?’

‘Oh! Charlie!’ Effie readily gave it. ‘Of course I knew it—*wasn’t*, and I am so glad you have come.’

‘Yes—and I have seen him since you have!’

‘Oh! have you—have you?’

‘I gave him my blessing not three hours ago, and asked if he was prepared, as one of the fearful consequences of the rash act, to have me for a highly respected uncle.’

‘Dear Uncle Charlie,’ cried Effie, laughing and glowing again, ‘I’m afraid we never thought of that.’

‘You don’t say so! I should have thought uncles would have been the very first thing remembered! I have seen another uncle too; he came to the Club to meet Harry, and said he hated me because I was coming down here and he wasn’t, and he gave me this which he had

just written.' Charlie held out a letter, with which Effie ran away, to laugh and blush over Uncle Angus's remarks in solitude. Charlie took her seat and eagerly held out a hand.

'Dora, are you glad?'

'Oh! Charlie, more happy than I can say.'

'I thought so, I hoped so, but I wanted to know.' He pressed the hand he held—a frank pressure, as frankly returned before it was withdrawn.

'You have seen him,' she said. 'Isn't it delightful to see his face now?'

'Yes! Different from what it has looked lately, certainly!'

'Ah! he has been through so much.' Even in the midst of her joy Dora's eyes grew moist. 'He did not know she cared for him, and he thought Sir Malcolm would not like it—that they wanted her to marry some great man.'

'And so they did—himself! He has been our great man for some time past.'

'But not his own ever. He thought they wanted Mr. Grant.'

'I must say I never heard Colin Grant called a great man before! Who could put him before Harold?'

'No one but Harold himself, for when it comes to anything about himself he is most modest!'

'He is,' assented Charlie with full conviction.

‘And then there was his profession to think of, and above all—India. He never would have thought he could ask her to go there.’

‘Would she not have gone?’

‘Yes!’ cried Dora, her eyes kindling, ‘I do believe she would. I am sure there is not a place in the world that she would not be ready to go to now, if he were ordered there—dear little Effie!’

Charlie’s eyes met hers in an earnest gaze. He was seated by the hearth where they had sat together—how often! The face at his side was radiant with joy and brightness; beneath a glory of golden brown hair two melting sapphire depths were shining, the soft glow on the cheeks and on the lovely lips was deeper than its wont; every tint and turn of the beautiful creature before him seemed instinct with life and happiness. Well might Sir Edward Anstey say—as he had been heard to say—that in spite of the three engagements the rose of the garden was ungathered yet.

‘You *are* happy, Dora! I can see it.’

She clasped her hands. ‘I am so happy that I feel as if I had never been happy before. Even when he was coming home—when he was here, still, I knew he must go again—it was a happiness for the time only, and I would not look beyond. But this is such a perfect, complete happiness; every hour it seems better than

before ! There is nothing left to wish for—excepting that his foot should grow stronger, and it must now, I am sure.’

Charlie’s eyes were intently fixed on her as though in a dream ; they did not leave her face even when she ceased speaking, while his own grew slightly paler. ‘ Yes,’ he cried, waking up with a sudden start. ‘ Yes—not too quickly though, or Harry’s conscience will be pricking him as a deserter.’

‘ He must set his face another way now. He must be a laird. If we could only have known, that morning the messenger came to Glenarchie !’

‘ Yes. Do you remember how Effie cried ?’

‘ And how you comforted her. Ah ! well—he has not wanted it since.’

‘ Angus Campbell ? No. He would never have cared to live there. I have heard him say so.’

‘ But Harry must ; he must be a good laird, and he will ! Oh ! how little I once thought I should ever live to love that dreadful name—Kildrummie !’

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HAROLD returned to a happiness that had just the amount of alloy necessary to make it fit for mortal man. It was impossible he should see such a military career so suddenly and speedily brought to a close, yet feel no regrets, and when he found that by his side Effie would have feared no distance and believed in no danger, there were moments when he could have wished to recall those papers which were already in the hands of the authorities at the War Office. But whatever he might have desired, or she would have dared, Fate had spoken in a way not to be misunderstood. His wounded foot would require much care for so considerable a period, that for a long time campaigning would, in any case, have been out of the question for him. This Harold knew, and a barrack life was not, as he owed to himself, worth half an hour's regret. He must, as Dora had said, learn to set his face another way, and prepare for arts of peace and the cares and sweets of a property which Effie, in imagination, had already made

over to him wholly and for ever, demanding in return nothing but to be the warder of that sofa in the Oak room, to which the surgeon's sentence had bound him a captive for many hours in the day. Harry might laugh and compare her to a tyrant and himself to a slave as much as he pleased ; she was inexorable, and he before long seemed to have discovered that his chains were of roses.

It was at Sir Philip's particular request that the Hanger, rather than Hurst or Grosvenor Square, was still to be the headquarters of the party. The present state of affairs had revealed, even more strongly than any past occasions, how great a change had come over him during the last three years. That his eldest son should marry and settle had formerly been Sir Philip's chief desire, and so irreproachable and respectable an alliance as the one about to be contracted promised to be would have filled him with much gratified pride. Why it failed to do so now he could hardly have told. He had seen Lady Cecilia and her relations, and could find no fault with any of them, yet the intelligence of Harold and Effie's engagement stirred a pulse in his heart which had never been roused by the thought of Phil's, nor by the sight of the lady about to become his daughter-in-law. Sir Philip had made sufficient progress in self-knowledge half to suspect that he was out of humour, and

even to compare himself with a child who has cried for the moon, and because he cannot get it will be contented with nothing else. And if some envious sighs were heaved at the thought of his brother John's good fortune—not only because his adopted son was making so perfect a marriage, but still more because his adopted daughter was making none at all—such sighs were checked by the admission that John had deserved it all—yes, even all the indescribable delight which had dictated every line written by the good Vicar to Sir Malcolm, to welcome Effie to his heart and hearth.

One consolation, however, Sir Philip reserved for himself. Phil was not to be married till January, then was to come the conventional honeymoon, to be followed by the London season, so that for another six or eight months he still might call his home his own, to be ordered in the old ways and brightened with the old faces, and one face above all—a bright, if not an old one—Sir Philip had determined should not be wanting. But wherever Dora was just now Harold must be too, and as it was equally evident that Harold was not to be parted from Effie, Sir Philip found an excellent plea for defying Uncle John and detaining them all, since Sir Malcolm and Di had promised to return as quickly as possible to the Hanger's hospitable walls, and

not to speak of quitting them till January should summon all back to London to celebrate one wedding and prepare for another. Effie would be of age at the beginning of the year, after which there would be nothing left to wait for.

But there was another wedding to be got through first of all, of insignificant importance, it might be, in Sir Philip's eyes, yet interesting enough to some of the Hanger's present inmates. One especially was not likely to be allowed to escape, and before long Dora was laughing over the receipt of two notes in one day containing the same request.

'Would Miss Vaughan give Lady Cecilia Langley the pleasure of acting as one of her twelve bridesmaids on January —th? The dress would be so and so, to be seen at Madame Such-a-one's.' This was the first epistle.

'Would dear Miss Vaughan forgive what might seem a liberty on such a short acquaintance, and increase the happiness of Lucy and Mr. Grey by consenting to be a bridesmaid at their quiet wedding on December —th?' This was the second invitation. One writer might appear to confer and one to entreat a favour—Miss Vaughan's business was equally to consent to both.

'Positively for the last time though,' she said, with a gay nod to Effie, as she folded up her pair of notes. 'Miss Vaughan's wardrobe cannot

possibly contain *more* than two bridesmaid's costumes at once.'

'Borrow Goody's best gown,' suggested Harold. 'It's quite smart enough.'

'You are not only to wear another bridesmaid's dress,' asserted Effie, 'but you are to choose and settle it all.'

'And do you fondly suppose Harry will allow his bridesmaids any gowns at all—beyond a white muslin and a daisy in their hair?'

'Well,' said Harold, 'and what would you want more?'

'Nothing at all, if I were Mysie and Lily, who are evidently the proper persons for such a toilet; but as winter is apt to be cold, and as I am growing old——'

'Rubbish!'

'I intend to order a sober satin, in which I can afterwards go down the hill of life in comfort and dignity. Good-bye.'

'She doesn't mean it?' said Effie, turning to Harold when they were left alone, with a shade of doubt on her brow.

'That she is growing old? So she is—so we all are. You especially; you'll be awfully old on the second of January, shan't you?'

'I shall be older,' Effie admitted.

'And won't it be awful, when you think of all that has to follow?'

This question being satisfactorily disposed of, Effie returned to her point.

‘But about not being a bridesmaid—of course she is only in fun?’

‘Leave me to manage the Dormouse,’ said Harry. ‘Those that won’t be brides must be content with being bridesmaids.’

‘Ah!’ Effie’s embroidery needle paused in its career; she sat for a moment lost in thought.

‘Well,’ said Harry, turning towards her, ‘what now?’

‘Oh! nothing particular.’

‘Then let us hear something that’s not particular,’ said he, taking a slender hand captive.

‘It is too bad!’ she cried. ‘I never can keep the least little thought to myself now.’

‘Never mind, you shall keep the next little thought; but I want to know what that “Ah!” meant.’

Effie hesitated, blushed, looked down, drew patterns with her needle’s point, and at last whispered, ‘It was only something that I have sometimes wished for very much.’

‘About Dora?’

‘Yes; can’t you think?’

‘Not I.’

‘I should not have thought of it perhaps at all if papa had not once said something that showed me how much he would like it.’

‘Sir Malcolm?’ Harold sat up, and looked at her fixedly. ‘What did he say?’

‘That he hoped perhaps some day Uncle Angus——’

‘Good heavens!’ Harold was on his feet in a moment.

‘Oh pray—pray, lie down again.’

‘Never mind me! That he—that she—that they—*liked* one another?’

‘Oh! no. But one day at Glenarchie he had been talking to me about people making homes happy—I don’t know why, I’m sure,’ said Effie, blushing again. ‘And then he said how well fitted Uncle Angus was to do so, and that he wished a great friend of mine, and of his own, might some day think so too.’

Harold made a face in silence. She looked at him timidly; a little awe still mingled now and then with her happy love. ‘He is older, I know,’ she faltered, ‘but Dora herself is twenty-seven now.’

‘Looks about seventeen,’ was Harry’s prompt reply.

‘But Uncle Angus does not look old,’ pleaded she. ‘He is so bright, he always seems young, and there are *so* few people in the world good enough for him, or for her, that you would not mind—would you?’ Effie laid her work aside and stood up, the better to draw her tall hero down to his sofa once more. He made her sit

beside him, shook his head at her with a comical air, and then cried 'Well! You *are* determined to make a nephew of me—and no mistake!'

'Oh!' cried she in answer, with a merry laugh, 'we must forget all about uncles and aunts now.'

'I've swallowed Charlie; but—my word! to have the Dormouse into the bargain!'

'But if they *really* liked one another,' she pleaded again.

'And what can make you imagine that they do?'

'I did not imagine it. It was papa; from his way of speaking I thought he guessed something, and though I don't know at all, I hope—I do hope it may be true!'

'And what should make her be hoping any such a thing?' inquired Harold, as he stooped his high head until the brown and the pale gold locks were close to each other.

'I suppose,' she whispered with a shy sweetness delightful to her lover's ear, 'because I want everyone I love to be as happy as I am now.'

To such an answer there was so much to be said in return that even Uncle Angus and Dora speedily retired into the background of Effie's thoughts. The subject was not renewed between them; she waited until Harold should speak of it again, and Harold spoke of it no more. The weeks that followed were so crowded with

personal happiness and business, that Effie had enough in her own feelings and prospects to occupy both heart and mind to the utmost. Yet many a time would the thought recur that Christmas was to bring Uncle Angus to the Hanger, and never without the corresponding hope that the visit might leave some wonderful and happy result behind it.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CHRISTMAS EVE came and brought its usual duties with it. That they might be properly fulfilled, Dora, Effie, and Harold were to spend the day at Hurst, Charlie, who had arrived the evening before, promising to be with them in the afternoon, but that morning he was wanted in another direction. To please his father, not himself, he had, some time ago, consented to become a magistrate, and was to take his seat on the bench when it assembled at Arnborough on that twenty-fourth of December. The whole scene was so new to him that, as he arrived at the town hall, and turned towards the magistrates' room, his unpractised eye observed nothing particular in the size or behaviour of the crowd assembled at the general entrance. The policemen were, however, having a busy time of it among a set of roughs, who had evidently not been drawn together by a mere desire of beholding the magistrates' well-known and not always welcome countenances.

Presently there was a movement amongst them, and all heads turned in one direction, as

a thickset man, his hat planted over his eyes, came elbowing his way between them with a swaggering, defiant air. Instantly rude laughter and hisses were to be heard around, mixed with loud taunts and oaths.

‘Aye, caught it now yourself, have ye?’
‘Who’s sold up, old boy?’ ‘What’ll they give ye for Davy’s arm?’ ‘Where’s the sneak that don’t pay his men?’

The man pushed on through it all till he had reached the top of the steps; then, turning round, shook his fist with a deep oath at the crowd outside before he passed within the building. The dark, sinister face that scowled upon them was the same that had glared on Charles Merivale in the Compton Bank more than two years before. The features were reddened and thickened by two additional years of hard drinking; the expression was the very same. They had not been prosperous years to Grover. The foundry which was to have made him rich had been his ruin. The borrowed capital on which it had been started had never been repaid; even the interest had for some time not been forthcoming. It had stopped work some months before, and workmen were still clamorously demanding wages left unpaid. In a drunken altercation with one of these Grover had flung him on some iron bars and broken his arm, and the man, refusing any compromise, at once took out a summons

for an assault. It was to answer this charge that Grover had now to appear before the bench.

When sober, Grover was a shrewd man, and, well aware that his usual weapon, overbearing insolence, would be useless here, he had resolved to represent the whole affair as an accident, a dispute in which David Green had been the aggressor, and to regret that, in flinging him off with unintentional force, he had sent him over the pile of old iron, which had been the real origin of the accident. Any proper compensation he would be—as he had from the first declared—most ready to pay, had the man's temper suffered him to take it. Such was the tale to be fluently unfolded when he entered the magistrates' room that morning, with a bold step and would-be untroubled face. But the next moment he started; his countenance changed. There was a head of curling chestnut hair, too conspicuous amongst its bald and grey companions to be for an instant overlooked. Yes—it was he! There he sat—one of the judges of the very man who not long ago had done his utmost to prove him a criminal, and bring him to public disgrace. Grover stopped as though shot, and clenched his hands, a muttered imprecation almost escaping his lips. He seemed unable to withdraw his eyes from the face of the man he had always hated the more

because he had been proved innocent, and beyond the reach of injury or reproach. There he sat, in a sphere altogether above his own, one amongst his peers, and undoubtedly, to all outward appearance, the noblest there. There he sat, gloating in his heart, no doubt, over the delicious revenge this hour had brought him !

With such a feeling as a fallen spirit might know for some messenger sent to pronounce his doom did Grover glare at Charles Merivale, his heart consumed by a wild and impotent rage, which drove all previous intentions far from his mind. His case came on. He answered with insolent words, scarcely knowing what he said ; they were but a few drops spilt from a soul filled to the brim with blackest hatred. Such behaviour was not likely to enlist the good-will of his judges. The elder magistrates looked at each other, surprised at the insolence, in such a place, even from the man before them, whose character was pretty well known to all, and the chairman, in naming the amount of the fine inflicted, added a few words of stern reprimand. Flinging down the money, Grover turned and strode towards the door. In doing so he passed in front of Charles Merivale, who, after the first moment of surprised recognition, had carefully kept his eyes upon the table before him. Involuntarily he raised them now, to encounter a glance so ferocious that he shrank back in

horror. 'God forgive him,' was his first thought, 'and keep him from ever crossing my path again,' his second. Had Grover been capable of such a thing as prayer, its object would have been of a totally opposite nature.

When the business of the morning was over, it was some time before Charlie could leave his elder colleagues, and the short afternoon was already closing in when he reached the Grange, and took his way from one empty room to another till he discovered Harold stretched on the schoolroom sofa. Everyone else, it appeared, was still in the church, decorating, but when Charlie would have joined them Harold declared it to be useless; the carriage was ordered to be ready in less than half an hour.

'They will be up directly,' he said, 'so sit down, J.P., and let us hear how your worship got on.'

Charlie sat down accordingly, and gave an account of the day's proceedings, not forgetting the appearance of Grover.

'Nasty brute,' was Harry's comment. 'Well—I shall have to turn J.P. myself before long, I suppose, and send poor wretches to prison who might have been twice as good as I am if they had only had the chance.'

'Does that refer to Grover and me?'

'Hum! I should say nature had made you worth one and a half of him. How Tom Barnes

ever could have gone near such a villain I can't imagine !'

'Harry, if I went out there, could I find his grave?'

'Out there ! To the Crimea?'

'Yes. Hyde is going there in his yacht this next spring with some other fellows, and he has asked me to come. I should like to find the grave, and have something put over it if I do ; and I may, perhaps.' Charlie rose and began fingering the china on the mantelpiece with an absent air.

'You before Sebastopol!' Harry gave a prodigious groan. 'Well, it's worth any man's seeing. You might easily do worse.'

'But could I find the grave?'

'You might if you could find anyone to tell you where the —th were encamped. It was down in—but I'll get out a plan of the lines by-and-by and show you.'

He lay back in silence, smoothing Sultan's silky ears, while distant battle-fields and deeds of daring, now for ever over for him, rushed back upon his mind. 'There is another grave you could see, at any rate,' he said presently.

'Fred's? Yes ; I thought of that, of course.'

'If he were here now I shouldn't have much left to wish for, in spite of this useless appendage.' Harold pointed to his foot. 'But

nothing can seem quite perfect without the dear old boy.'

'No. Wouldn't he have been grand as best man?'

'Wouldn't he! Wouldn't he have got himself up! I can see his old face—beaming over his tie!' Again Harold was silent.

'We needn't doubt,' said Charlie in a low voice, 'that he knows all about it—their marriage and yours—because it must make him happier wherever he is. He couldn't have done more for Lucy, if he had been here, than you have done.'

'You also. One does as one would be done by, I suppose,' said Harold, as he looked at Charlie with a peculiar light in his eyes. 'You'll have to be best man now, you know.'

'I should have thought you would rather have had one of your brother officers.'

'I'd rather have you than any man—alive. And so you really are thinking of going to see the old place?'

'I may—I don't know. Nothing is settled.'

'Why not? What does it depend upon?' Harold was regarding Charlie's absent motions and dreamy air with some attention.

'Nothing in particular. But one never knows what may be going to happen.'

'That's a fact, though not a new one. I

have been thinking much the same myself though, lately.'

'Have you? I should have thought you were an exception, and did know pretty well what was going to happen.'

'I can think of other people besides myself, old fellow, and now that I'm expecting to be turned off, I've been thinking a good deal of those I shall be leaving behind me.'

'Yes.' Charlie paused a moment, then looked resolutely in his companion's face and added 'Dora?'

'Dora, and Uncle John too. I wish I could think you were ever coming to make this place your home.'

'As things are now I could not do that.'

Harold looked up quickly. Charlie moved away, and threw himself into an arm-chair out of the immediate range of those observant eyes. Harold took up a book, and began slowly to cut the pages open before he spoke again.

'I have always thought,' he said, 'that you are just made for a parson, and what you mean by things being as they are now I don't exactly understand.'

'And I don't exactly understand why you think the more about it because you are going to be married.'

'Because I cannot like the prospect of Uncle John ever being left alone in his old age.'

‘Alone?’

‘If Dora married he would be alone.’

‘Dora! Why, what——’ He stopped short.

‘It is not my idea,’ continued Harold, still cutting his pages with great deliberation, ‘but of course it is likely to happen in course of time, and some people seem to have got it into their heads that it may be before so very long now.’

‘Have they?’

‘Yes, it seems so.’

There was total silence. Harold’s hand was motionless as he listened for another word, but none came. He could not even hear his companion breathe. After a minute or two he went on.

‘As I said—I know nothing about it myself, but I know you can keep a secret if it comes to nothing, and you may be interested in observing for yourself this Christmas—as I shall do—now he is coming.’

No answer yet.

‘You can guess who it is, of course,’ continued Harold, after another pause.

‘Angus Campbell, you mean. And you think that she likes him?’ Charlie’s voice was unusually calm.

‘I know nothing about that,’ said Harold hastily. ‘It’s other people’s notion, not mine; but I’m going to look out now—that’s all. Have

you seen this article on India?' and he took up the paper.

'Yes, I saw it this morning.'

Another silence. Harold longed to take a look at the motionless form behind him, yet never turned his head. 'How dark it grows!' he said. 'They ought to have been up by this time.'

'Yes. It is getting late; I must go.' Charlie rose quickly.

'Stay for the carriage, won't you?'

'Thanks, I would rather walk.'

He was gone.

Harold's eyes were fastened on the closing door in a reverie, which lasted so long that Sultan at length laid his head upon his master's knee, to look up in his face with bright inquiring eye.

'Ah! old boy,' said Harold, shaking his head at him, 'now don't I wish that you or any other fellow would have the goodness to tell me whether I have just gone and made a most egregious fool of myself or not!'

CHAPTER XL.

Alas! shall hope be nursed
On life's all-succouring breast in vain,
And made so perfect only to be slain?

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

DAYLIGHT was over when Charles Merivale left the Grange door, not taking the usual road, but blindly, unconscious where he went, turning mechanically into a shrubbery path, and striding forwards until he had passed through a gate leading towards the downs at the back by a steep ascent, up which he rushed like a man pursued, striking his feet against stones and clods in the failing light, yet still stumbling upwards, while a voice in his ears never ceased its single cry, 'It is not true—it cannot—cannot—cannot be true!' The top was reached at length, and he paused, breathless—exhausted not only by his own haste, but by the violent beating of his heart—and catching hold of the bare projecting branch of an old thorn-tree, bent down his forehead upon its rugged bark, to draw long panting breaths in dull, miserable bewilderment. What had Harold said? That Dora and Angus—but it was false!—all false! She was going to

marry no one—she had said so ! Nobody understood her but himself—no one else knew her heart. She was never to be Angus Campbell's, nor any one's but his own—his wife, if she had chosen it ; but—if she did not choose it—still his one love, and he, after Harold, her nearest, closest, dearest friend, so long as life should last ! This was fixed as a sacred right—how dared any man on earth to dream of interfering with it ! Such was the wild inarticulate cry of the heart that throbbed and burnt in the wintry twilight on the lonely hillside that Christmas Eve.

No change of thought seemed possible for a time, nor any change of posture ; his fingers stiffened on the bough. Outward movement became impossible, while a tumult of feelings was raging within him, drowning for a while the fainter voices of reason and reflection. Though Effie—Di—Malcolm—the whole world—had expected this marriage, what did it signify ? They knew nothing—*they* had not heard her declare, as he had, that she would never marry ! This was the one firm support to which he clung while the whirlwind of passion passed over him.

But at last, as he raised his head and the cold wind swept over his brow, a fresh thought came, piercing his soul with the keenness of a sword-thrust. Why had Dora said this thing ? *Had there been a cause ?* Until now he had

thought, in his innocence, that her ideal of married life had been too high, too noble for any earthly union to satisfy, and next to the ungranted joy of himself calling her his wife, this was the condition of things he preferred to any other. But now such an explanation seemed too small, too inadequate to account for so fixed a resolution as hers. What if those words had been prompted, not by an impossible dream, but by an unreturned affection? In agonising suspense his thoughts flew back; scenes half forgotten rose to his remembrance—old days at Glenarchie started once more to life, and other days that had followed on these—some recent—one long years ago. One instant's awful pause of thought—awful in its resistless force! There are moments in life when the strain of grief or apprehension presses with such violence upon heart and brain that the powers of the mind seem altered. Outward and visible things are withdrawn from its ken, and the whole force of mental vision is directed so strongly in one direction, that the whole meaning of facts hitherto little understood is recognised with a swiftness of intuition resembling inspiration. To Charlie it was revealed in that moment with the certainty of truth that when Dora's bitter tears had been shed as a girl they had fallen for the loss of Angus; that it was the love for Angus which had risen to her remembrance when she declared

that she could never marry. It was clear—it was plain—blind must he have been indeed not to have seen it before! And now Angus was seeking her again—then hope for himself was over! Without hesitation, without a murmur, Charles Merivale bowed his head, and acknowledged his own infinite inferiority. The wind across the hillside was keen, the earth was hard with frost, yet there he fell and lay, to water this cold mother's breast with tears—to breathe out on his lowly resting-place the suffering that no human ears must hear.

When he rose and looked around him it was no longer with a dazed, bewildered brain. All was clear now. Hurst lay at his feet. Through the gathering darkness the church's spire and the cottage roofs round it were still discernible; lights were beginning to sparkle in well-known windows, telling of cheerful homes and warm Christmas hearths. Here he had long thought that his own home might be found; here in this much loved spot had hoped to dwell among his own people. That hope was over. Near Dora he must not be for many years to come. The love that had grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength, brightening his boyhood and blessing his manhood, could not be forgotten now, nor the lifelong habit of a heart unlearned. Resign her he must; hope and joy could be his

no longer ; but love, unchangeable, eternal love, would be his for evermore. But that he might love her, he must leave her. From this sentence there was no appeal.

The fleecy clouds were parting, and a pale moon was gleaming overhead. Lonely and cold she shone, brightened only by a faint reflected light, and such would his life be to the end. The end—there would be an end at last ! Perhaps it might not be far off—perhaps Heaven would be merciful—perhaps this broken heart might soon be stilled in a quiet that nothing could break. But what had she once said to him ? That it was wrong to desire death—‘ *she knew it was.*’ Had she desired it once, even as he desired it now ? Had she too endured grief and loneliness, and was he grieving because joy might be coming to her at last ? A great throb shook his whole frame as he stretched out his arms to the empty air.

‘ My darling !’ he cried, ‘ my darling, be happy—be blest—I live for you ! If you are happy, what more can I ask of God ? ’

A few more silent moments he stood on that bleak hillside ; then, turning, took his slow way homewards across the well-known downs.

In a quarter of an hour, with scarcely any conscious thought of his own, he had reached a belt of wood dividing the open ground from the high road between Arnborough and the Hanger.

The wood was even darker than the downs, but it mattered not to him. He knew the path across it by heart, and was soon at the gate leading out into the road. It was locked, and he was putting out his hand to spring over it, when a sound made him pause. At first it seemed like a sound in the wood itself, but the next moment it had turned into the roll of wheels and the regular tramp of horses, and in another minute a carriage passed the gate not ten yards distant. It was the carriage from the Hanger, and the faces of its occupants could clearly be seen in the lamp's cheerful light. They were those of his brother and Angus Campbell, on their way from the station.

The moon was now shining brightly, and Charlie moved instinctively from the gate, upon which her beams were falling, to step within a thicket of young fir trees, which would have hidden him even in the daylight, while his eyes pursued the vanishing carriage. Another half-minute and it was gone, but the sound of the horses' feet came echoing back with sharp distinctness along the frozen road. Every footfall struck upon the heart of the lonely listener in the dark wood—every one was bringing nearer and nearer to his wished-for goal that fortunate and favoured man whose happiness was to be built upon the ruins of his own, for even in that momentary glimpse the joyous expression on Angus' face had been plainly visible.

Charles Merivale was but a mortal man, endowed with an ardent, sensitive nature, subject to all the trials and temptations which come upon men who have strongly loved and absolutely trusted. Love had triumphed over every personal feeling at the thought of Dora and Dora's past sorrow, but no such heavenly guardian came between his soul and the bitter jealousy which poured into it like a flood as he recalled that happy and triumphant face. The sight of his rival had banished every gentler thought and poisoned all his being. Angus was no longer remembered as a superior, more worthy of the prize than himself—he was now a man who had caused Dora's tears to flow, a man who had overlooked or neglected her love, carelessly throwing away the precious jewel which he himself would have given any price to win. Yet he had waited in vain, while his rival was to find it ready at any time he chose to stretch out a hand to take it. Charlie's eyes grew dim, and his hands were clenched in anguish; a wild storm of rebellion against God and hatred toward a fellow-creature came sweeping over his soul, blotting out every other sensation. What was life when continued on such conditions? A hollow mockery only. He bowed down his head, and could, like Job, have cursed in his heart the day on which he had been born.

Suddenly he was roused by the sound of a

step almost at his very side. He turned, and saw through the thick fir branches the outline of a man with his back towards him, looking fixedly over the gate, a gun in his hand. The figure was clearly visible in the moonlight, and in a moment Charlie was through the trees and beside Jonas Grover.

‘What may you be doing, sir, with that gun in my father’s woods after nightfall?’

The tone was as cold and haughty as Sir Philip’s own had ever been. Grover started violently, and turned round upon the speaker with a deep oath.

‘Over the gate,’ was Charlie’s stern command; ‘you have no business here.’

A mocking laugh answered him, followed by muttered words. ‘*Your* last day’s business is over, you young sprig of a magistrate.’

The next instant there was a momentary gleam in the moonlight—momentary as it was, it saved a human life. Charlie sprang aside, escaping from the discharge which had been aimed full at his heart. The next moment he had rushed at Grover, who in his turn stepped aside, and shifting his grasp on the gun to the lower end of the barrel swung round the butt end with prodigious force at his opponent’s head. Again Charlie moved to avoid it, but they were now under the shadow of the trees; he measured his distance amiss, and the blow fell with its strength

partly spent upon his left shoulder, making him stagger to one side and miss his footing in the darkness upon the uneven ground. The next moment the whole weight of Grover's body was flung against him with such violence that he fell to the ground, his antagonist falling over him, the gun still in his hands.

In the possession of the gun lay Grover's great advantage—though now discharged it was still a formidable weapon, could he but get a chance to employ it upon a fallen man. Charlie's left arm was pinioned to the ground by his enemy's weight upon it, but with the right hand he seized the barrel, exerting his utmost force to wrench it from Grover. In vain; for though youth and strength were on his side, the position in which he lay prevented the free use of his muscles, which had been chilled and stiffened by his own long exposure to the wintry blast on the hillside, while Grover, who had been drinking hard, seemed possessed with the force, as well as the passions, of a demon. Charlie could hear the panting breaths, mingled with broken oaths, closer in his ears while Grover struggled to plant one knee upon his chest, still keeping hold of the gun, over whose smooth barrel the three hands were now clasped with the tenacity of a vice. As a drowning man to an overhanging branch so did Charlie cling to that single chance of safety; for he knew that if Grover obtained

its full use again, another such blow as the last, with surer aim, before he himself should have had time to rise, and he must be carried out of that wood a dead man! Yet even as he clung he felt his strength deserting him; his one hand, raised upwards as he lay, was unable to match the wild-beast fury of the man above him; another minute, and all might be over. His head swam. Was he indeed to die this horrible death—close to home and friends, unknown, unhelped? Was he to die just as his heart had been torn by evil passions—a rebel in God's sight? An unspoken cry rose in his heart, a cry for life this time—not for death. Once more the two men closed in a final effort before Grover, with a tremendous pull, succeeded in wrenching away the gun from the hand that could hold it no longer. He had triumphed—it was for a moment only! As the strain exerted against him suddenly ceased, he fell backwards, losing his balance, and thus freeing his antagonist's left arm, which had hitherto been wholly imprisoned. Another moment, and the position was reversed—Charlie's knee was on his throat, the gun was twisted out of his hands, and Grover himself lay disarmed and prostrate, at the mercy of the man whose life he had attempted not five minutes before.

It was a man who could not stretch out his hand against a fallen foe. Quick as lightning Charlie had sprung to his feet, had hurled the

gun far away into the road, then, turning, had placed his back against the gate.

‘Now you cowardly ruffian,’ he cried, ‘come on, if you dare!’

He waited in vain. The branches rustled in the darkness, and Charlie knew that his enemy had fled.

CHAPTER XLI.

The year its course had rolled,
And brought blithe Christmas back again
With all his hospitable train.—SIR W. SCOTT.

CHRISTMAS morning is different from any other morning in the year. All the world over, hearts are open and memories busy, kind words are spoken and bitter feelings buried; ‘the whole world is kin,’ drawn closely together by a common bond of love, hope, and faith—because it is Christmas Day.

The ideal place for spending it is, perhaps, among a large family party met together from different quarters in a home of centuries, where ancestors, wreathed in holly and ivy, look down from the walls to tell of those who kept Christmas within them through many a bygone generation, while children, clustering round the table, carry the imagination forward to a distant future, and open a prospect bright with hope and promise for generations yet to come.

Such a party had now met together under the carved oak roof of the Hanger dining-room, where nearly twenty familiar faces, old and young, were

filling the long room. Merivales, Campbells, Darrells, Vaughans, and Miss Goode, from her cottage—all were assembled together, and good wishes, gay voices, happy greetings, and children's laughter sounded pleasantly on every side. There were tender words, too, spoken between some who knew that the next Christmas might find them more closely united or more widely separated. But the one who could have had most to tell kept the most silence.

To no one had Charlie uttered a syllable of his encounter the evening before, and when he entered the dining-room on Christmas morning, it was not, as usual, to go the round of the table with a gay greeting to all the world, but to drop into a vacant seat close to the door, with the fewest possible words to anyone. Sir Malcolm, who was his neighbour, was not likely to disturb him; he was fully occupied in watching Effie's happy face, as she sat at Harold's side—and by her father's satisfied smile it was evident that he had made up his mind to resign her in no grudging spirit—or in contemplating another pair seated further down the table, where Angus Campbell seemed to have nearly as much to say to his fair neighbour as Harold to his betrothed. Charlie's eyes were scarcely raised from his plate, though he seldom remembered to put its contents to his lips; but once his gaze, like Sir Malcolm's,

travelled down to the further end of the table, where, for a few moments, it appeared to be fixed; then—the first of the party—he rose and left the room. Others, however, could not remain long after him; all must soon be on their way to Hurst church, where it was the constant custom that the whole family should assemble together on Christmas morning.

The grand old church was looking its best to-day in the festival dress which careful and loving hands had bestowed upon it. All the wealth of the woods and gardens had been brought together to pay a tribute here. Wreaths of rich green and clusters of bright berries brought out in double distinctness the beauties of some slender shaft or ancient carving. Lace-like ivy drooped from massive capitals, or marked the line of string-course and moulding; velvet mosses and graceful ferns peeped out of deep stone recesses as though they had never known another home; tufts and boughs of laurel, bay, and holly followed the course of arch and column, or shone forth in nature's untouched curves, as if the spirit of the woods had bidden each tree and shrub to hasten hither and itself assume its own appointed place. Christmas roses from the Grange and purest white camellias from the Hanger crowned the circular Norman font, studs of scarlet berries lying between them. Everywhere the leafy loveliness seemed declaring one truth and singing

one song: 'The trees of the wood shall rejoice before the Lord.'

The sight was a novel one to Angus Campbell, in its Christmas joy and beauty, and he gazed unweariedly, first at the ornamented walls around him, then at the rows of village faces filling the seats they contained. Rugged and weather-beaten, worn and thin, many of them might be, yet they harmonised well with their own grand church, under whose protecting shade they had been reared. Soon there was a little stir, bent heads were raised, books were opened, and wandering looks recalled, for now, in fresh white surplice, forth came the Vicar to meet his flock, with the same kind gaze, the same happy countenance, the same unchanged expression of fervent good-will with which he had greeted them every Christmas for the last forty years. The bright eye was scarcely dimmed, the form was scarcely bent, and if a fresh touch of snow seemed to be falling on the honoured head with each successive Christmas, it could but add a tenderer emotion to the affection with which the hearts of his people from year to year were wont to meet their Vicar. Well might it be so, since there was not one among them, from the oldest to the youngest, who did not know how firm and how well-proved a friend in joy and sorrow, in sickness and in health, they possessed in the man now standing

before them. Happy the people that are in such a case !

Dora's Christmas duties were manifold, and though most of the party returned at once to the Hanger, she, with her uncle and Miss Goode, did not reach it till dark, when the children were already assembling in the hall for Christmas games, and clamouring for the appearance of those two powerful allies, Uncle John and Cousin Dora, 'Sister being no good at all, now that she was going to be married,' according to little Angus's scornful complaint.

But Dora defended Sister, reminding Gussie that there were plenty without her this Christmas Day.

The little boy turned round upon her.

'Why don't *you* marry?' he demanded. 'Hasn't nobody asked you?'

There was a chorus of laughter from the company, and Dora, assuring him that she was only waiting until the king of fairies should arrive to go and live with him for ever in fairyland, bore off the young objector to the delights of snapdragon and blind man's buff—the best substitutes for fairyland to be had just at present.

'Gussie's French education seems to have taught him nothing about *embarras de richesses*,' said Sir Malcolm in a low voice to his brother, who was standing beside him.

'That has been the difficulty, has it?' re-

turned he. 'I should have supposed there might have been a greater.'

'What do you mean?'

'Miss Vaughan's unwillingness to leave her uncle.'

'No doubt she would feel it. But the time must come for such a parting; even he must desire that it should.'

Angus smiled slightly, and crossed the hall to join in the children's games.

Half an hour later, when some of the elders were pausing to rest, he came to the corner where Dora had placed herself, and took a chair beside her. He spoke of the church, of its decorations, and its Christmas service, with an admiration equally lively and sincere, lamenting the want of such a festival in non-Christmas-keeping Scotland. 'I would express a hope,' he added, 'that it will be well observed at Kildrummie in future, only that, I fear, you would hardly thank me for it.'

'No, indeed! I hope we shall have them here at Christmas for a long time to come.'

'I hope so too. I have not found a quiet moment till now in which to speak to you about it as I should wish, Miss Vaughan, nor to express properly the great delight which dear little Effie's engagement has given me; not that you can have doubted that anyone would feel it an honour to be connected with your brother.'

Her happy face was a sufficient encouragement to him to pursue the subject.

‘I have been a trustee, you know, and in Malcolm’s absence the management of the property has been left to me. It will be a real satisfaction to resign it into such excellent hands as his—my future nephew’s,’ he added, smiling, ‘though indeed I feel little worthy to stand in the position of uncle to such a distinguished hero; he will look upon me in future, I trust, rather as a brother than an uncle.’

‘I am sure he will! He would always have been very glad to have had a brother.’

‘I shall beg him to let me fill that post, so far as may be, and to believe that no relationship could be too close for my own feelings.’

Dora’s eyes were dwelling with a wrapt gaze upon Harold, as he sat, deep in conversation with Effie, at the other end of the long hall. Mr. Campbell’s took the same direction.

‘They are very happy,’ he said, after a moment’s pause.

‘They are indeed!’

‘Yes; she has found her fairy king! We must trust it is a fairyland that will not vanish away.’

There was some sadness in his tone—but the next moment he roused himself and spoke more lightly.

‘How little we could imagine what the end of it all would be, years ago, at Glenarchie!’

‘Little indeed!’ she answered.

‘Do you remember it well?’

‘Perfectly, as if it were yesterday! I was out on the hills, and saw Sir Malcolm’s messenger riding up the valley. Poor little Effie—she cried for an hour!’

‘Ah! Confess, Miss Vaughan, that you *now* think no messenger ever brought better news.’

‘That is very unfair,’ she cried, turning on him a laughing face. ‘I thought it very bad news then.’

‘Did you indeed?’

‘Certainly! We all did—Effie most of all.’

‘And you will not own that you have changed your mind?’

‘How can I, in present company? Besides, if you only knew—but you must know all, I think.’

‘Present company would be quite of the same opinion, I assure you, and does not regret Kildrummie in the least. But I am not sure that I do know “all.”’

‘Not that Kildrummie has been very much in the way of late?’

‘Indeed. Do you mean to say that matters might have been brought to a conclusion more easily if our good aunt had never changed her will?’

‘Yes. Has not Sir Malcolm told you?’

‘I have hardly seen Malcolm alone since I heard of the engagement. I have not many

spare hours in town, you know, and he came down here almost as soon as I knew of it. But pray let me hear the whole—so far as it may be told.'

The tale, to Dora's mind, was too much to Harry's honour for her to be unwilling to speak of it. It was right that one who was to be so close a connection of Harold's should have a just idea of his disinterested feelings. With glowing eyes she spoke—how long she knew not, for though she intended it to be an outline only, the theme was an absorbing one; nor did it seem to have less attraction for her companion, judging from his earnest attention and quick, sympathetic replies. They had been left the only occupants of the hall for a longer time than either was at all aware of, when Dora started, as a tall black and white figure passed before her.

'Charlie—dressed!' she cried. 'Is it possible it can be so late?'

'It is nearly dinner-time. Did you not hear the gong?'

'No indeed! Oh! Mr. Campbell, what disgrace we shall be in!'

She rose and hurried away, followed by Angus. Charlie took her vacant seat, and sinking back turned his face from the light.

Presently he in his turn was invaded. Phil was the new-comer—a comer in need of immediate sympathy and attention.

‘I say, Charlie,’ he began, ‘what’s all this? Harry was telling me just now that you are thinking of going out with Hyde in his yacht?’

An inarticulate sound was the only answer.

‘Shall you go?’ his brother went on

Charlie turned round. Even the unobservant Phil was struck with his face.

‘What’s the matter, old fellow?’

‘A headache,’ was the answer.

‘You do look uncommonly seedy! Well, just look here. If you are off to those parts, why not come back by Rome and Naples, and so on, and go about with us—if you go at all, you know.’

‘I shall go. But you would not want me.’

‘Oh! I don’t know about that. You wouldn’t be there till February at best—soonest, that is. When shall you be off; now?’

‘Not till Harold’s wedding is over. I shall have to join the others at Marseilles or Nice. They will be cruising about in the Mediterranean.’

‘Well—well,’ said Phil reluctantly, ‘say the end of February, or beginning of March.’

Charlie was silent.

‘March—that would be the latest,’ continued his brother. ‘The fact is, it’s all very well to keep on about Rome and Naples and all the rest of it—in reason—but, between you and me, any fellow might find three months of it uncommonly slow—don’t you know?’

‘There is a great deal to see, of course.’

‘Oh—I dare say, but I never had any great fancy for a parcel of old ruins myself! Of course, one has to do the proper thing, for once—but there’s no need to go dragging about by ourselves such a time as that! Now, when you came we should be three—at any rate!’

‘You must ask Cecilia,’ said Charlie. ‘She might not want me.’

Phil got up to pace the hall. ‘Look here,’ he said, ‘can’t you come to London in a day or two?’

‘Why? Do you want me there?’

Yes—Phil wanted him, as it soon appeared, very particularly, for he would have to be there himself in a couple of days, in attendance on his bride and her family, who were immediately expected, and he had no kind of fancy for going up alone. The fact was that the prospect of the ceremony now impending was making Colonel Merivale unmistakably nervous; in ten days’ time the die would be cast, and he felt that constant companionship would be necessary in what he termed his ‘off’ hours. To his great satisfaction his brother gave an immediate assent. He would accompany him to London at once, to support him under the prospect of impending bliss.

To Phil this might be merely a welcome relief from solitude; to Charlie it was an opportunity of escape from torture! How he should have endured to see and hear that which was now

before him for another week he did not know. The next day he was almost invisible until dinner-time, and on the following morning he silently took a long farewell of home, and started with Phil for London.

CHAPTER XLII.

To err is human, to forgive, divine.—POPE.

‘WELL, and how has everything gone off?’

The speaker was Mr. Campbell; the place, his sister-in-law’s sitting-room; the time, late on the afternoon of that eventful day which had given a new mistress to the Hanger.

Harold answered with a long groan. ‘Weddings are failures,’ he said; ‘that’s a fact! They ought to be abolished.’

Angus laughed.

‘You hear, Effie?’ he said. ‘He wants to be let off at the last minute, after all!’

‘Why people such as we are,’ continued Harry, ‘can’t be married without a wedding passes my comprehension. Look at old John!’

‘With the greatest pleasure, if you will point him out.’

‘The cowman at home, to be sure! Milked the cows at 6.30, and fed the pigs at 7. Marched his good woman into church at 10.30, and got it over in half an hour. Milked the cows again

in the afternoon, and fed the pigs—like a man! That's the way to do the business!'

'In his secret soul,' said Dora, 'he is envying all the splendour to-day, and despairing of our being able to manage anything like it ourselves.'

'Like it! Who on earth would want to look like Phil!'

'How was that?' inquired Angus.

'As though he were going to be hung—and no wonder, with all that crowd to stare at him! Old John for me! No fuss, no flummery, no boring of your unfortunate fellow-creatures out of their lives for four mortal hours there!'

All laughed, but Dora admitted that it was a pity the crowding and staring at a London wedding should seem to turn it into a show.

'Only at a London wedding?' asked Angus.

'Oh!' said she, 'there may be a crowd in the country, but it is a different crowd—not strangers or mere acquaintance, but neighbours and old friends, which makes all the difference.'

'We know, Miss Vaughan,' said Angus, with a smile, 'how inferior London is in every way to the country—the latter, of course, has a monopoly of all the hearts in the world—there are none at all scattered about among this million and a half of people!'

'Just a few here and there, I dare say—among those, you know, who are fortunate enough to spend most of their time in the country!'

‘Ah! you are incorrigible. And yet I remember there was once a time when you thought you would like to live in London.’

‘Surely I never said so?’

‘Indeed you did; on Loch Archie—years ago!’

‘Did I? What a good memory to remember such a little thing!’

‘Yes—long ago, but I remember some things well. I thought of those times when I was ordering this. May I show it to you?’ He glanced across to the other two, who were by this time oblivious of all but themselves, and then took out a morocco case. ‘It has just come home,’ he said, ‘and I could not resist the temptation of stealing ten minutes and bringing it at once. Will it do? Do you think it will suit Mrs. Vaughan?’

It was a very lovely necklace, bearing a crowned and heart-shaped locket in delicate blue enamel work and diamonds. Effie’s presents had been numerous, but nothing so perfect as this gift had yet appeared. Words failed to express her delight and admiration, while even Harold declared it to be faultless.

‘You have been too good, too generous to me all my life—do you remember the first locket you ever gave me?’ she said, as she thanked the giver warmly.

‘Yes, dear Effie, I do; and when I ordered

this I thought of two things. First, that it must be Eton blue, in honour of—someone who doesn't like weddings—and then that it must be a heart, in remembrance of that little locket over which we made up our dreadful quarrel as to which of us should have Kildrummie.'

The graceful, affectionate manner was the very same that had comforted the sad little heiress many years before. For a few moments the scene in the Glenarchie drawing-room passed like a dream before Dora's eyes. The dream was repeating itself in the actual fact, for Effie detached her old friend, shining and thin with constant wear, to lay it on the table beside its gorgeous successor, and Mr. Campbell was taking the hair from the one and placing it in the other locket.

'Former times are not always better than these—are they?' he said. 'There is room for *two* locks in your new locket, Effie.'

'One ought to be yours,' she said, gratefully.

'Ah! if I were only worthy of such companionship—but you must steal a more heroic lock to go with this one! And now I must fly—I rushed away from a world of work to bring you this. Good night.'

He took up his hat, and yet lingered a little when he had crossed the room again. 'You go down at once, Miss Vaughan?' he said. 'When do you return?'

‘In a week’s time, two days before the wedding. Harold will be with Charlie, as he was in the summer.’

‘That wedding-day will be a happy one for all Effie’s friends, but I sometimes fear that the change will be great at Hurst.’

‘Ah!—yes.’ The words were spoken with an involuntary sigh.

‘Happy to be so regretted!’ Her sigh was echoed. ‘Good night, Miss Vaughan; we shall meet again so soon, I need scarcely say good-bye.’

He went, and when Dora also had left the room Effie drew a little nearer to the sofa, the jewel-case in her hand.

‘I don’t think, Harry,’ she whispered, ‘that I shall ask for a lock of your hair for this.’

‘I should be the last person to press it upon you!’

‘I shall live in hopes of putting another person’s hair there some day,’ she said, looking lovingly at the little curl, now reposing alone on a wide expanse of white satin.

Harold was silent.

‘You know what I told you?’ she whispered once more.

‘Yes.’

‘And do you—don’t you think that perhaps it is coming true?’

‘I don’t think at all about it. I wish I had never——’ He stopped.

‘You do not wish I had never told you? You are not vexed with me?’

‘With *you*! No. Did Charlie say he was to be here this evening?’ he asked, after a moment’s pause.

‘Charlie—I think not, I think he was telling mamma he had an engagement. Did you want him?’

Harry twisted his moustache. ‘I mean to succeed to Phil’s place as an interesting object,’ he answered, dryly. ‘Charlie may devote himself to me.’

But Charlie had other aims and occupations than any which Harold could divine. For some days past, ever since the receipt of a letter from Arnborough, he had daily taken his way to distant parts of London to visit police-stations with ceaseless energy and unwearied inquiries, returning every evening from what had appeared to be a fruitless errand. But, early on the morning of the day after his brother’s wedding, a visitor was ushered into his room, at the sight of whose blue coat and brass buttons Charlie rose up eagerly.

‘Have you heard anything of him?’ he asked.

‘We think so, sir; but if he is your man he has met with an accident.’

‘Where is he? Can you take me to him?’

‘Yes, sir, if you don’t mind a roughish place.’

Charlie answered by taking his hat and following the policeman down the stairs. A han-

som was called and an address given to the man. It was more than half an hour before they were set down in a region where all was grimy, squalid, and unclean; yet when the cab had been dismissed the policeman led the way, through narrow alleys and round unsavoury corners, to yet worse dirt and worse degradation, of which depth seemed to sink below depth in this Inferno of the human race. Charlie would have been thankful if several of his senses could have been dulled as he passed along with a sickening sensation of horror. Boys as ragged and as wretched-looking as those around him now he had indeed seen in the school where he had assisted Mr. Grey, but the haunts that sent them forth—never. It is one thing for misery to come to us, and another to go ourselves to misery. ‘Can men and—worse than men—women and children be doomed to pass their whole lives in such an awful prison as this?’ was his inward comment, as his eye roved only from one form of squalor and wretchedness to another. At length the policeman stopped before a house, of which, like all the rest, the door stood open, showing a filthy entrance and dilapidated staircase within.

‘Here is the place, sir; will you go up?’

Charlie nodded, and they ascended a flight of stairs which seemed at every step ready to give way beneath their weight. The policeman opened a door, and they entered a room, dark and un-

sweet, bare of all things, save one broken chair, on which an old Irishwoman sat by some smouldering ashes in the fireplace, and a pallet bed in one corner, on which a man's form could be seen. The policeman went up to him.

‘Here, my man,’ said he, ‘here’s a gentleman come to see what he can do for you.’

The prostrate man turned round his heavy, swollen face, disfigured by a blow, and drawn into deep lines by pain. Bad as the countenance already was, it grew worse as a gleam of recognition and of hatred came into his eyes together.

‘Curse him! what has he come here for? There were devils enough without,’ he muttered fiercely; then turned and drew the ragged bed-clothes round his head, as though determined neither to hear nor to see.

‘He’s your man then, sir,’ said the policeman in a low voice.

Charlie signed assent, and motioned the latter to follow him outside the door, and to bring the woman with him, to be questioned. The information which had enabled him to set the police on Grover’s track was derived from Mr. Brown, with whom he had spent some hours during his last day at home. With a distinct understanding that the communication must be considered as confidential, he had told him of the attack. Mr. Brown was able in return to tell him that Grover had been nowhere seen in Arnborough since

his appearance before the magistrates. Charlie directed him to be on the look-out for any tidings he could hear of the man, stating at length his reasons for this, and begging Mr. Brown to discover his present abode, if possible. The agent had at length been able to hunt out Grover's own nephew, who had been much mixed up with his uncle's affairs, and to lay before him such reasons for speech as at length had induced him to own that Grover himself had written to him declaring that he was cleared out and about to leave the country.

Grover's letter, however, had contained no address, but his nephew named a coffee-house at the East-End, to which he knew him to have been in the habit of going.

As it turned out, however, Grover had on this occasion avoided the place where he was known, and had lodged in a low public-house in the neighbourhood, while debating within himself for which of the colonies he would take his passage with all the ready money he had been able to lay hands on in his flight. But a drunken boast, uttered one evening, drew the attention of his companions upon him, and the next night he was set upon in the street, hustled down a dark alley, and robbed of his pocket-book and all its contents, after a desperate struggle, which ended in his being flung to the ground with a broken leg. Some inhabitant of the wretched street,

more pitiful than the rest, had managed to convey him within the house on the doorstep of which he was lying in a helpless state, and had given notice of the affair at one of the police-courts where Charlie had already made his inquiries. The description given corresponded with that of Grover's appearance, and the policeman had in consequence come to seek him, and had then gone at once to Charles Merivale's lodgings.

Charlie could learn nothing more from the woman, who was chiefly bent on impressing upon so grand a visitor that poor folk could not afford to take in lodgers for nothing. After a brief consultation with the policeman, the latter departed in search of a doctor, while, putting some money into the woman's hand, and bidding her keep away for the present, Charlie turned back again into the room. Within and without that door the air, the scents, the sights were equally unpleasing, and he, on looking round, felt that his enemy had fallen low indeed. Tom Barnes himself, the poor outcast, when flying from this very man's revenge, had never sunk to such a depth ; youth and strength had still been his, but what hope of restoration was left to this drunken, ruined wretch, wounded and helpless as he now was ? Charlie again drew near the bed.

‘Mr. Grover,’ he said, ‘I am sorry to find you here.’

Grover neither turned his head nor made the least reply.

‘ You have been much hurt, I fear? ’

No answer, no movement.

‘ You must know me, I think? Charles Merivale.’

The sullen lips unclosed now, but with such words, such a torrent of abuse, that Charlie stepped back and raised his hands as though to shut them out. ‘ Hush, man,’ he cried, ‘ for God’s sake stop! What have I come here for do you think, but to do you good? ’

‘ Good?—you lie! I know what you come for,’ and again began the horrible abuse, drawn forth by evil passion and strong pain, for while the curses were passing the sick man’s lips he writhed as though in torture. Charles Merivale stood immovable this time, his first look of horror changing by degrees into one of deep compassion. Beneath that calm steadfast gaze Grover sank back at last, silenced and exhausted. His visitor began again.

‘ You speak to me as an enemy,’ he said, ‘ but I have come to you as a friend.’

‘ A friend! Ha, ha! I know the sort of friend—but you can’t touch me! I don’t owe you a penny, but I do owe you’—and his blood-shot eyes gleamed in fury—‘ more than you would like me to pay; but if I could only stand upon this cursed leg, you shouldn’t leave this

room till I had had my revenge,' and his fist fell with another oath upon the ragged coverings.

'Why do you speak of revenge? I have never injured you.'

'Never injured me! Your father's son never injured me! You have hated me and I have hated you, and I would be revenged on all the men I hate!'

'I have not hated you. You tried to take my life, but I have no wish to be revenged upon you.'

Charlie spoke the simple truth. Vengeance had never been in his thoughts at the first, and, if it had, the inward struggles of the last ten days, the deep waters that had gone over his soul, would have washed away any such desire had it ever existed. Time cannot always be measured by days or weeks, and since that evening when hope had been blotted from his heart the hours of sorrow through which he had passed had seemed an eternity of suffering, and the conflict in the dark wood a thing of very long ago. Grover, as he lay helpless before him, could rouse little but pity in his soul—he was fallen too low, they were too immeasurably distant from each other for any personal feeling to be excited by the sight.

'I have been trying to find you for days,' he continued. 'I knew you were in trouble as to your business, and I wanted to propose some-

thing that might be to your advantage, but I will not speak of it now that you are suffering so much.'

'*You* help me in trouble—a likely thing!' was the scornful answer.

'Yes—I. Though I never injured you myself, yet I stand in the place of one who did, and who tried to take your money illegally, though he believed he had a right to it himself.'

'That rascal Barnes! Curse him!'

A glow came over Charlie's cheek. 'He is beyond the reach of human curses, Mr. Grover, and it is with his money that I wish to help you. If some reparation is made with this, will you not try to think more gently of him, and forgive a man who died far away—almost without a friend?'

Grover fixed his eyes upon the speaker.

'So you want to come over me that way, do you? None of your cursed cant for me! All you are after is to get me into your power some way or another. You'd not lift a finger to help me; you would——' He paused, panting for breath, while his eyes closed. He had been excited beyond his strength; a livid paleness overspread his face, and drops of moisture broke out upon his brow. There was nothing in the room but cold water in a jug. Charlie poured some of it into a broken cup and held it to the man's lips, then dipped his own handkerchief in the

water and laid it on his forehead. Presently Grover again opened his eyes, the glare of passion and hatred in them still unquenched. 'You have tracked me down,' he panted, 'you have dogged my steps, all to ruin me worse, if you can, than I am ruined already—that's all that you care for.'

'And you really believe that I would have searched for you, and have waited day after day in hopes of finding you, only to do you harm at the last?'

'Think! I *know* it. Why'—and he almost raised himself up in the bed, helpless as he was, in his fierce vehemence—'wouldn't I wait, *didn't* I wait to be revenged on you? Didn't I wait in the wood all that afternoon watching the Arnborough road?'

'All that afternoon!' A chill ran through Charlie's frame. He had not fathomed the depth of this man's cold blooded malignity. He had been persuaded that the attack in the wood arose from a sudden impulse only, the result of anger at being discovered in the preserves with his gun after nightfall.

'Ah!' said Grover, with a malicious gleam in his eye, 'and at last—when you did come, though 'twas t'other way, there was nothing saved you but that cursed carriage. My gun was up when your hand was on the gate, and if they had been but one half-minute later it

would have been all up with you, my fine fellow !’

A fiendish laugh followed his words. Charlie stood motionless. Could this be true? He remembered his own sudden turn into the thick fir wood as the carriage drew near, and Grover’s attitude, like that of a man searching for something of which he had lost sight in the darkness, when he had first seen him standing beside the gate. Then nothing had saved him but the approach of that carriage! Grover had not dared to shoot until it should have passed. And what had his own feelings been at the time? Charlie’s blood rushed to his brow at the remembrance of them. What evil passions, what jealousy, little short of hatred, had filled his soul at the sight of the very thing sent by a merciful God to be his deliverance! Deeply had the sin been repented of, yet at this moment all past repentance seemed light in comparison to the bitter shame and contrition with which he recalled his dark rebellious outcry against the Hand which at that very instant was being stretched out to guard him. If he had fallen, what a moment in which to die! And what would not others have suffered—his father, his uncle—Dora—yes, Dora would have mourned him! From what had not they, as well as he, been saved! His eye fell on the man who would have wrought all this suffering—the man who hated him with-

out a cause. Five minutes before the distance between them had seemed immense—immeasurable. Now Charlie bent towards him and spoke in a low voice.

‘ You would have taken my life ; God stopped your hand. May we both be forgiven by Him for all the sins we have committed in His sight ! ’

He turned away, and the silence in the room remained unbroken until steps sounded again outside the door.

CHAPTER XLIII

It was late before Charlie returned to his lodgings that day. The task he had undertaken was a heavy one, even at the outset. The doctor brought by the policeman at once pronounced that Grover's leg had been badly broken, and ought to have been attended to many hours before. More assistance had to be procured, and a stretcher brought on which to remove him to a hospital. It was a long affair, and Charlie at first remained by his side, rendering all the assistance in his power, then, preceding him to the hospital, he engaged a separate room, and made every arrangement for the patient's comfort that was possible under the circumstances. Not until he had seen Grover, now half unconscious from pain and exhaustion, safely transported to this haven of comparative peace, did he return himself, to find that a message had been left by Harold, inquiring when he would be at home. Charlie had provided himself with evening engagements during the few days the Vaughans had been in London, but he now wrote a line begging Harold to call the next morning. He must see him,

and must see him alone. Since he was himself so soon to leave England, it was necessary that someone should know his wishes and be ready to act in his place.

When Harold arrived on the following morning he laid the facts of the case before him, with the exception of the attack in the wood, about which he said nothing. He spoke of the discovery of Grover, and explained his own reasons for seeking him out. In the first place he was anxious to secure the foundry and the ground on which it stood, that he might make the ground over to his father. If Grover were entirely bankrupt, this property would, he imagined, pass into his creditors' hands, but he had had only report to go upon when consulting with Mr. Brown upon the subject. The latter had surmised the worst as to the condition of the business on account of Grover's sudden disappearance, but for this Charlie had privately believed there might be another reason ; he might have feared legal action would be taken against him on account of his murderous assault.

If his affairs were in confusion, but not yet in a desperate state, his creditors, to whom there seemed no doubt that he owed much more than he was able to pay, might be willing, in lieu of payment, that the business should be made over to their hands to be carried on by them in his stead. This Charlie was anxious to prevent, by

coming forward and offering to become an immediate purchaser on such liberal terms that they would be glad to accept his offer. Mr. Brown had thought it a feasible arrangement; the foundry had been failing for some time past, and whoever undertook it now must do so at considerable risk of loss. Whenever a meeting of the creditors could be called Mr. Brown would put himself in communication with them, and all the necessary negotiations would be carried on through him, but he had objected to be the sole and final judge as to the amount to be offered for the foundry. It was not a business in which Charlie desired that either his father or uncle should be mixed up, and he therefore, after going at length into the details, begged Harold to take his place, and to consult with Mr. Brown as to what should be offered, in case of his own absence from England in any place where letters might take long in reaching him. 'It seems strange and hardly fair to ask you to undertake any business just now,' he said, 'but I should be very much obliged if you would do it.'

Harold paused for a few moments. The attention he had given to the narration had not prevented him from observing the narrator closely, and he was sensible of feeling that, whether the request itself was strange or not, Charlie's countenance, voice, and manner, as he

made it, were certainly strange. The last fortnight had worked some unaccountable change in him. It was not only that he looked pale and thin; the expression of his face had altered. There was a gravity, a fixedness of look, which would have better become a man of twice his age, and, in spite of the purely business-like nature of his communication, the touch of melancholy which now and then mingled in his tones did not escape his companion's ear.

‘I don't understand,’ he said, ‘why you took all these pains to hunt up Grover. If he is ruined and had made off, I should have thought that the creditors, who would naturally lay hands on the land, would have been the only people you need have troubled yourself about, and it seems that young Grover told Brown everything had gone to grief.’

‘Yes. But I had another reason for wishing to find Grover. I wanted to see him.’

‘Did you? I would walk several yards any day to avoid seeing him—the brute!’

‘But you and I do not stand in exactly the same relation to him.’

‘My relation to him is *nil*, thank Heaven! And yours is the same, only more so.’

‘You forget that I have Tom Barnes' money.’

‘Some of it, I suppose, you may have, though you seem to be getting rid of it as quickly as may be. But what has that to do with it?’

‘Only that with the money I have also his duties. I have a duty towards Grover now, in Tom’s place.’

‘Can you really induce yourself to believe that if Tom Barnes were alive now he would recognise that he owed any duty of any kind towards old Grover?’

‘That I can’t say. But if I think he ought to recognise it, then I, as his representative, am bound to do it. Grover was a hard master to poor Tom, we all know; still nothing could justify him in trying to get the man’s money illegally. He did him an injury.’

‘Not a bit. The Bank made it up.’

‘But he did not. He had nothing to do with that, and so far as restoring money can make up for taking it dishonestly, I think it ought to be done by Tom’s money now.’

‘I can’t own to any “ought” in the matter,’ said Harold. ‘You owe that man nothing—not even a grudge, I know,’ he added, with a laugh, ‘though that is the debt most fellows would keep up against him if they were in your place. What is it you want to do for him now?’

‘I want, when all his affairs are wound up here, to give him the means to start again in another country.’

‘My dear fellow, he will drink himself to death in a year or two, whatever country he goes to!’

‘He may change yet,’ said Charlie. ‘He will have had a sharp lesson.’

‘The sharper the better! But if he owes more than he can pay here, it strikes me he hasn’t much right to be provided for elsewhere.’

‘The creditors will not lose by anything I may do for him, and they will gain by my offer to themselves. We should be merciful to a man when he is down; he should have a chance of rising.’

‘And so,’ said Harold, with some impatience, ‘after spending nearly thirty thousand, first and last, on Arnborough, you are going to throw away I don’t know how much more on this new scheme of yours. Old Matthews’ money will soon be gone at this rate.’

‘Well,’ said Charlie weariedly, ‘let it go! Why not, if it can do any good? But probably I shall spend but little now. My father will insist on paying for the ground if I can secure it. All I can do is to save him any trouble and annoyance by acting for him. Will you help me? Will you let Brown appeal to you in my place, in case I cannot easily be got at?’

‘Why should you imagine such a thing?’ said Harold uneasily. ‘You are not going to the other end of the earth—only to the Crimea. You will be back in two or three months at latest. I don’t imagine Grover’s affairs can be properly

investigated under that time. You will be back to speak for yourself.'

'But if I am not?'

'It seems to me pretty certain you will be.'

'Nothing is certain. Life is not certain. Will you not do it for me?'

'To be sure I will if you want it. But you won't want it, all the same.'

This protest seemed to afford Harold some especial satisfaction, since he renewed it whenever the subject was brought forward between them before he left town, but it did not prevent Charlie from giving him every detail that he thought necessary, while all discussion as to the probability of his speedy return he met with vague words or silence. Before leaving home he had spoken to his father of the intended voyage to the Crimea, but nothing as to his future intentions, nor would he now mention them to Harold. All had better be done by letters from a distance. One of the friends he was about to join had often talked of a tour in America; if they could make their plans suit they might travel together. Any surprise felt at home at his own sudden resolution would be materially lessened by such an arrangement; for the present, therefore, it was best to say nothing.

Sir Philip, far from expecting a prolonged absence on the part of his son, was just now discontented with a short one. That Charlie should

have accompanied Phil to London was comprehensible—his brother had needed a companion ; that he should go to the Crimea was all very well—it was a place that any young man might naturally wish to see ; but since he was so soon to leave England—having arranged to start the very day of the wedding—why did he not spend the present week at home ? Pheasants were waiting to be shot and hunters to be ridden ; what could be keeping him in London now ?

Harold brought no explanation of this phenomenon when he returned for the last time in his single life to the Grange. When Sir Philip and his uncle asked him what was detaining Charlie in town he said that he did not know ; when Dora asked him the same question he stroked his moustache in a meditative manner, and looked at her with the same reflective glance he had not long before been bestowing upon Charlie.

‘What keeps him in town ? Well, I think I shall ask you that, as he has not stated it to me.’

‘How should I know what it is ?’

‘Are not you generally in his confidence ? You used to be.’

‘That was some time ago,’ she said, turning away. ‘He was more at home then. Time must make some change, and he cannot be always telling me what he is going to do now, of course.’

She had reason to say so. He had told her

nothing for the last six months, not even his intention of travelling now. But all this was for the best. It was the wisest course for him to pursue at present, and she must not and would not regret it.

CHAPTER XLIV.

He who stems a stream with sand,
And fetters flame with flaxen band,
Has yet a harder task to prove :
By firm resolve to conquer love.—SIR W. SCOTT.

CLAN CAMPBELL was expected to muster in strength on Effie's wedding-day. Scotch cousins of many degrees were to swell the bridal train, and to Dora, as bridesmaid-in-chief, Sir Malcolm made over his lists and responsibilities. She was to settle the proper order of precedence by instinct, to discern a Campbell in the turn of a head, and tell a second cousin from a third by the pressure of a hand. So at least Angus Campbell had declared when they all met together in Grosvenor Square on the evening before the wedding.

‘You must let me come to your rescue, Miss Vaughan,’ he said. ‘You will be drowned in this sea of Campbells, unless you have someone to face it with you. I must really come here before the procession starts.’

He proved as good as his word. Clients and causes must do without him for one day, while he played the part of a host, in every

sense, to the bridesmaids who mustered that wedding morning in the drawing-room, awaiting the descent of the bride. Sir Malcolm—almost as unconscious of outward matters on his daughter's wedding-day as he had been on his own—had eyes for none but herself. He lingered with loving pride beside his little Effie in her fair array, to which Di and Dora were adding every moment some perfecting touch, until she stood complete in spotless grace, 'a snowdrop hung with tears'—happy tears! soon to melt away beneath the rays of an unclouded sunshine. Well did the father who folded her in his arms know how gentle and loving was the heart, how simple and unselfish the spirit he was about to commit into another's keeping. These were the bridal gifts that would deck her future home, this was her truest dower.

There was nothing to mar this thought in the dress which Effie had pleaded for, a dress with which Harold could find no fault, therefore the only dress for her in the world. Nothing could have suited the wearer better than the quiet, unbroken folds of satin, and simple veil which any village maiden might have wreathed around her head; but this had never entered into the bride's calculations. Veil, leaf, and flower were worn, not for the rows of spectators between whom she was soon moving, hanging on her father's arm with dreamy, downcast eyes, but for the sake of

the one who stood waiting to receive her, the only figure in the whole church towards which those eyes were raised.

Harold's taste had been remembered in other costumes also, and with equal success. There was more than one gazer on the bridal party who felt that, had he been able to paint an angel, she must have appeared in folds of floating white touched with celestial blue, and a snowy crown around a halo of golden hair, gleaming in misty radiance, as a few stray sunbeams, triumphant over time and place, found their way through London's wintry haze, to bring a message of hope and gladness as the Vicar of Hurst joined Harold and Effie hand in hand for ever.

Mr. Campbell was waiting at the church door to hand the many bridesmaids into the carriages that successively received them so soon as the bride and bridegroom had driven away. They came in reverse order this time, little Mysie and Lily the first, while Dora was the last to go. It gave him time for a word and a smile apart.

'Have I not done well, Miss Vaughan? Not a single heart-burning all down the family tree! I must find a moment to come and beg for some praise presently.'

That moment, however, was not easily to be found. Whatever other wedding-days might seem in length, this one appeared to fly with horrible rapidity; the half-hour before the break-

fast was consumed almost before Dora thought it had begun, in ceaseless congratulation and introduction. It was difficult to move amidst the crowd with which the house was filled. The hour for the breakfast had come ; she would be going away herself soon afterwards. Mr. Campbell by that time had made his way to her side.

‘At last, Miss Vaughan, I come to lay my triumph at your feet. Breakfast will be announced directly. Everybody has been introduced ; all the bridesmaids down to the farthest remove are properly arranged and provided for ; and now may I claim my reward ? ’

‘Indeed, Mr. Campbell, I don’t know what we should have done without you, but will you do one thing more, and tell me where Charlie is ? I want to speak to him, to say good-bye. Uncle John and I are to start directly Harry and Effie are gone.’

‘You are not going back to-day ? ’

‘Yes ; we are going home at once.’

‘So very soon ! ’

‘I could not stay now. I wanted to get back. Di does not mind—she understands.’

A sudden quiver in Dora’s voice surprised herself ; she looked down, and began hastily to pull off the petals of a rose in her bouquet.

‘And I understand too.’ The tone showed that the words were sincere. She glanced up at him gratefully.

‘And you will be staying on quietly at Hurst just now—for the next few days, at any rate?’

‘Yes. We shall be very quiet now.’

‘That will be best. There is Charles Merivale near that door; he sees you, he is coming—no, he is turning. Shall I try to get at him? There is such a crowd that I fear——’

‘Not now, do not try; I will wait till he is nearer. We shall all be moving downstairs directly.’

Angus took a paper from his pocket. ‘This is the order of going down Di gave me,’ he said. ‘There is only one irregularity—the best man does not take you; she thought it would be too much like brother and sister.’

‘Yes, certainly.’

‘And that being the case, I dared to ask for his vacant place. There are others here much more fit for such an honour, but I ventured to think there was no one else with whom you could so easily be—what I know you must want to be to-day—silent. You will forgive me for thrusting myself on you like this?’

‘You are very good. You are quite right, I shall be glad; it is coming so near the time when he must go.’

‘And you will be what you have been—brave to the end,’ he said, in a low, swift whisper. ‘These things must be gone through. We all know what that is—how hard sometimes—when

our hearts are too full with our own feelings—our own longings.’ He stopped.

She could not speak. He took the flowers she had just laid down and buried his face in them for a moment.

‘And now for that truant Charlie,’ he cried in his usual tone. ‘Where is he?—ah! there, talking to your brother in the window, receiving some last important instruction, no doubt. You must forgive all seeming neglect on the part of a best man, Miss Vaughan. He has no sinecure, I can assure you, judging by my own remembrances of Malcolm.’

He led her thoughts back to their first acquaintance and the merry wedding breakfast years ago, till he had made her laugh again.

Neither he nor she would easily have guessed the substance of Harold and Charlie’s conversation, nor the contents of the letter which the latter took from his pocket, when he had managed to draw the bridegroom apart from the crowd.

‘Here it is, Harry.’

‘Is it? What is it?’

‘The letter I told you I expected from Brown; it came just as we were going to the church.’

‘Ah! to be sure; what was it to say?’

‘You don’t remember—no wonder! I won’t bother you now. I will write and send it to you this evening.’

‘No, no. I recollect ; it was to say when the creditors will meet, wasn’t it?’

‘Yes ; in a week’s time. He wants me to speak to Grover about it. I was going to the hospital this afternoon, at any rate, to see him once more.’

‘You have been going there for ever!’

‘Yes ; but it has not been wasted time. He is a good deal sobered, he will listen to me now, and as I have made him believe at last that I want to help him, I am going to try to get him to speak openly about his affairs. Then I will write to Brown and to you—that is,’ and he smiled faintly, ‘if Paris may be allowed to hold communication with Paradise!’

‘You are not going to stay in Paris?’

‘I must for a day or two, till I hear from Hyde where the yacht is ; then I shall join them at once.’

‘And be off to the old shop ! Well—I won’t say I envy you!’

‘Hardly, I should think.’ Charlie turned away, and from the other side of the room Sir Malcolm was beckoning to Harold, who was wanted to lead his bride downstairs.

‘One hour more of penance,’ he whispered, as he drew her arm within his own, ‘and it will be all over.’

If it were a penance it was one very patiently borne by the softly blushing Effie, whose thoughts

were wholly occupied during breakfast by her father on her right hand and her husband on her left. Whatever tumult of feelings might be agitating some hearts among the many guests crowding the long and brilliant table, a heaven of peace, love, and trust had taken its place at the top. Mr. Campbell was true to his word. Dora found she might sit as silent as she pleased at his side, and lose herself in contemplation of Harold as a bridegroom—such a bridegroom as not every wedding could boast of! Angus watched the direction of her eyes with a quiet smile, but only once bent down to speak to her.

‘A happy man, is he not? And I have just been adding, I hope, the last drop to the cup of bliss by persuading Malcolm to let us off all speeches. I knew how grateful everybody would be in their hearts—and we will drink their health in Highland fashion instead.’

It was done, and before the ringing cheers had died away Effie and two or three more had vanished from the room. In half an hour she came down again, no longer a white-robed queen, but a slender form in dark velvet. Harold was following her; the carriage stood at the door. When all adieus had been spoken, she suddenly paused on the doorstep.

‘Our myrtle—I had forgotten it!’ and she pulled a branch from her bouquet. ‘We are going to have a piece planted to grow into a

tree. Dora will take it—give it to Dora, she would not come down! Oh, dear papa—do not let her be very sad, now that I have taken him away!’

One arm was round her father’s neck, but the other hand was clasped in her uncle’s, and it was in Angus’s fingers that the myrtle was left.

‘We will take care of her, my dearest child,’ said Sir Malcolm, as, with a last farewell, he laid her hand on Harold’s arm. But Effie paused once more at the carriage door, and looked up into the white face of someone standing beside it.

‘Dear Charlie, good-bye.’ She lifted her lips to his. It was like kissing a statue.

‘Good-bye, old fellow,’ said Harry, with a grasp that might almost have given life to a statue itself. ‘Thank you a thousand times over, and take care of yourself till we meet again. Good people are scarce!’

The door closed, and they were gone.

Gone! The pageant was over. The mask which had been so resolutely worn might be dropped now. This was the moment for which Charlie had waited—a moment of mingled relief and agony. He turned, and, pressing through the crowd around him, rushed up the stairs towards Di’s sitting-room on the deserted upper floor. There pushing the door open he entered—suddenly to stop short. Dora was there—not alone. Someone had sought her before him!

She was at the further end of the room, facing him, with one hand supporting herself against a table, in the other holding the branch of myrtle, fresh, sweet, and blossoming, not like that withered Highland myrtle she had thrown from her in passionate grief many years ago. Her face was pale and bore traces of tears, but there was a faint smile on her lips, and the lovely eyes were lifted to meet the gaze which Mr. Campbell, at her side, was bending upon them. Charlie's heart gave a great throb as he stood motionless before her. He had seen—the end! He had seen her stand, as she soon would stand, in bridal white, to speak her bridal vows. It was well he should see it since it was thus that he must think of her for ever—most pure—most fair, at another man's side!

In that moment his face took a still sterner expression. He made a step forward. Angus turned, exclaimed, and came towards him. The gaze of the two men met; in the eyes of the other each read the irrepressible truth.

‘Leave us—and I will leave her!’

It was Charlie who spoke, and as Angus instantly passed him to quit the room, he drew nearer to Dora, who greeted him with a welcoming, yet wondering, look.

‘Charlie,’ she said, ‘I thought you would come; I could not believe you would keep away altogether, and never say good-bye.’

‘No, Dora—I am here.’

The wonder in her eyes increased as she looked at him. He took both her hands, the myrtle branch still in one, and looked into her eyes with a gaze so deep and searching that she shrank involuntarily away from its intensity and from the deep tones in which he spoke again—

‘I am here for the last time. I shall not see you again until—long afterwards.’

‘After what? What are you saying?’

‘When I am gone, when I am far away, will you think of me? Will you ever remember me? Oh—my lost love!’ His stern voice broke down; the last words were a low cry. She trembled at the sound.

‘Oh, Charlie! do not speak so. You are not going to be away long!’

‘When you think of me, Dora—not mine—remember that I loved you to the end, with a love that only seeks your happiness. I do not hate him—not now; not if he can make you happy!’

‘Hate! Whom do you mean!’

He looked at her for an instant in silence, then dropped one of the hands he held.

‘The man who gave you that.’

‘Charlie!’

Unconsciously she stepped back, raising the hand that held the myrtle branch to her breast, while the warm colour rushed over her face.

‘If he loves you truly,’ he went on, in a hurried, broken voice, ‘then I will bless him, and pray for him, as for you ; but if he ever forgets or neglects you, as once he did—never let him come near me !’

‘What are you saying ?’ she broke in. ‘It cannot be true !’

‘Dora, my only love—good-bye ! God knows for how long. Good-bye !’

He turned, and the closing door woke her from her trance of amazement.

‘Charlie !’ she cried, rushing forward, ‘Charlie ! come back !’

He was gone. She followed in vain. Below was the crowd, still filling the house, and as she paused on the stairs, hesitating to descend, an entreaty was brought from Mr. Merivale that she would prepare to start as quickly as possible. In a few minutes she was down again in her travelling dress. Mr. Merivale was awaiting her in the hall.

‘Come, my dear, or we shall lose the train.’

She gave one swift glance around. Mr. Campbell was beside her, bidding her farewell. Again the deep blush covered her face ; she hurried away, unable to speak, and in another minute had driven from the house.

That evening, when she came to her uncle to wish him good night, he put his arms tenderly around her.

‘Good night, my dearest child,’ he said, ‘my treasure still, so long as I may keep her.’

To his surprise Dora was sobbing on his breast.

‘Oh! Uncle John, how *can* you say such a thing!’

‘Why, what is it? Mustn’t I think she may want to fly away from the old nest some day?’

‘Not while you will keep me—never, never!’

‘Ah, to be sure! That’s what all think, till the time comes.’

‘I cannot leave you, Uncle John! I never could leave you,’ she sobbed again, clinging more closely.

‘And you sha’n’t, my darling—not till you want to go, not till we can have another wedding as perfect as to-day’s—and *that* won’t be just yet awhile! There now—go away, to rest and be happy.’

CHAPTER XLV.

When from that trance thou wakest, never more
On earth hope for it, for its life is o'er;
That one approach of the Divinity
Is but the pledge of thy affinity.
That lovely vision shall not be renewed,
Though through all forms of being close pursued;
The light must pass into the heavens above thee,
Thy polar star, to warn, and lead, and move thee.

FRANCIS A. KEMBLE.

MR. CAMPBELL rang the door-bell of Hurst Grange before noon on the following day, and asked for Miss Vaughan. He was shown into the drawing-room, where Dora sat alone.

He shook hands in silence, then hastily took something from his pocket and offered it to her.

‘You dropped this yesterday as you left the house; I have brought it back again.’

It was a little lace handkerchief, and its appearance did not diminish Dora’s surprise at seeing him. Surely Mr. Campbell had not come all the way from London to bring back her handkerchief! When she thanked him he walked away and hardly seemed to hear her.

‘Mr. Merivale is not at home, I suppose?’ he said.

She was not sure, but when she rose to seek him Mr. Campbell came back, and stood before her.

‘Do not go. It was not to see him that I came. I hoped—it was yourself.’

The blush which had covered her face at his entrance deepened with painful intensity.

‘I have come,’ he said, laying one hand upon the table to steady himself, ‘because it was impossible to stay away. I could not wait any longer. I must ask—I must tell you—Miss Vaughan, may I speak?’

Speech was impossible on her side ; she could neither move nor look at him.

‘May I tell you, what you know, that all my heart is yours—has long been yours ; and, though all I have on earth is too little to offer, all, all is yours—if you will make me most blest in accepting it?’

She had turned away, covering her face with her hands. He heard the long-drawn breaths, as though she were struggling for calmness, and came a little nearer.

‘I would speak to you of my love, but words are too weak, and of my unworthiness, but who could ever deserve you? If an absolute devotion, if the worship of a man’s whole soul can win you, then may I hope? May I have one word, one look, one little sign to tell me it is not

beyond hope—not impossible that some day—some day I may call this mine?’

He raised his hand and would have touched one of her own, but she shrank back.

‘Do not! Oh, do not!’ she entreated.

‘I have not frightened you? I have not been too hasty? Forgive me; you will not think so when you know how I have been waiting and longing. All yesterday it was so hard to be silent—not to tell you of the heart that was yours; of the home that was waiting—only waiting for a word to be your own!’

Again he tried to take her hand, but she dropped them both, and stood facing him, pale now, and very still.

‘This is my own home,’ she said. ‘I must stay here.’

‘Ah! I knew you would say so; I knew what a hard battle it would be! But you will not always say that—you will not always refuse for your uncle’s sake? It would be too much; he could not wish it himself if he were asked.’

‘But he must not be asked.’

‘Will you never think of any but him?—never of yourself—never of one who will give anything—do anything to win you? Miss Vaughan, you will not be so cruel?’

‘I must be true.’ She clasped her hands together; her eyes were widely opened, while

a painful effort contracted her brows. 'I do think of myself when I say I could not—I cannot!'

'You cannot! Oh! forgive me, but it is I who cannot take that answer—cannot believe it!'

'But you must believe it,' she said steadily, 'for it is true.'

He looked on her for a moment with an unaltered countenance, then moved a chair towards her, and, taking another himself, said gently :

'You will listen to me, I know. I have come down to-day on purpose to speak to you ; you are too just, too kind, to send me away unheard. I will not ask for anything now, excepting to be allowed to speak.'

Her distressed expression of face did not change, but she seated herself in silence, still looking away, though the intent earnestness of his own gaze seemed beseeching her to turn her eyes towards him.

'Miss Vaughan, I will not try to tell you for how long I have thought of you as one of the best and rarest of God's creatures upon this earth. I will speak not of long ago, but of later times, when I came and saw you again—when I found the remembrance of the past turned into a still brighter, more beautiful reality. Forgive me—let me speak—indeed this is no flattery, it is the simple truth ; and oh! how can I make you know what that sight was

to me, how it stirred my heart, how it brought back feelings and wishes which I had thought were dead and buried long ago? But I did not forget the difference between us. I knew it to be probable that your choice would fall upon some younger man, some one who—who was not a widower—I would not hope, I tried not even to form a wish! But it was impossible to see you and not to wish and feel, unless I had had a heart of stone. How could I see you and not love you? Do not stop me—hear me at last! It was when I saw you here, in your own home, among those who love you, when I grew to know your true worth, your noble, gentle heart, that I dared to begin to hope for myself, and to trust that you would not turn from me because I too have once had a home—and have lost it.’

‘No, no; not that! But, Mr. Campbell, pray say no more; indeed——’

‘You will hear me to the end, I know. Then, as time passed on, it was such a joy to believe that events were drawing us closer. The great kindness I have received here and at the Hanger—your own friendship for Effie—and now your brother’s marriage, all these things were doubly and trebly welcome, because I trusted—I trust they too may plead my cause; and when you remember how I admire and respect your uncle, surely you will believe that no one could wish

to separate you less from him than I should do. No one would be a truer son, no one would welcome him so gladly or divide you so little. I have thought of it again and again, for I know all you feel for him. Will you not believe it, and trust me when I promise——’

‘Hush!’ she cried, ‘hush! You have said too much. You are mistaken. It is not for my uncle’s sake that I say it cannot be. It is for my own.’

‘Your own!’ he said breathlessly. ‘But why? Miss Vaughan, you do not doubt me—you do not mistake—you have not been hearing anything against me?’

‘No, nothing—nothing—it is not that, but because—I cannot return your feeling.’

He grew paler. ‘I do not understand—how can this be? It cannot! Oh! no; for you are truth itself; you would never have misled me by a look—a sign!’

‘Indeed, I would not!’

‘Then you will not—you cannot be cruel now, when you have suffered me to hope, and never repulsed me before. That would not be like yourself.’

‘But I never knew—I never understood——’

‘Impossible! Impossible that you should not have felt for many months all that you were to me!’

‘You are mistaken. Indeed, you are mis-

taken. I had no idea of such a thing until'—again she coloured deeply—'late yesterday.'

'Late *yesterday*! Yesterday!—and I had loved you so long! I had been trying to win you for months and months; I had believed you knew it all. Oh! I cannot have been mistaken. No! look into your own heart; does it not tell you that mine was understood?'

'No,' she repeated steadily; 'I understood nothing.'

'But did my manner tell you nothing? Could you not read—yes! you surely have read how much it meant!'

'Never!' she cried. 'How should I—how could I think it meant anything when I knew—I remembered——' She stopped.

'You *remembered*!' He came a step nearer. His face changed. 'What!' he said hoarsely, 'do you mean to tell me that whatever I said or did, you could not believe I was in earnest—that things which from another man would have meant everything, from me meant—nothing?'

Her face had changed also; her lips trembled, yet she still answered steadily, 'I never thought that they—that you—had any serious meaning.'

'But why—why?' cried he wildly. 'Tell me the truth! Why not?'

She turned her eyes silently upon him. The truth was written there.

'My God!' he said, stepping back. Then, in

a tone of still bitterer despair, 'My punishment!' He sank upon a seat and covered his face.

A moment can do the work that years have failed to effect. A deeply cherished hope had fallen to ruin before his eyes, and the destroyer was none but himself—his long past self! Those only who have felt it may know the agony of such a moment. When he looked up again his whole countenance had changed. The look he fixed upon her was that of a man who bids farewell to all he has loved. Dora's own eyes filled with tears beneath it.

'I am too late, then,' he said, in a broken voice, 'too late! Are those tears for me? You would not shed them if you had anything else to give me. There is no hope for me—you do not love me.'

'I must not tell an untruth,' she said sadly. 'I do not love you! I never meant to deceive you into thinking that I did.'

'I understand.'

The dreary hopelessness of his tone brought fresh tears to her eyes. Deepest pity filled her soul, but nothing more. She could not offer comfort. She could not look again upon that haggard face, with the hollow eyes; it pierced her heart to see it. She could wish for one thing only—that he would go away. But he stood still, fixed in despair.

'Do you believe,' he said, in a voice that

seemed the echo of his look, 'that I have been in earnest this time—at last?'

She clasped her hands together. 'I do believe it; I do indeed.'

'But it makes no difference?' Hope is hard to kill. It was dying in him, yet it struggled to the end. She shook her head.

He grew paler still. 'Then all is over. Oh! Dora—and you loved me once!'

A flash came from her eyes; but the next moment they fell on him with the same gentleness as before. 'You did not mean to say that,' she answered.

'No; I did not! I have no right. Have mercy on me; I am wild; I do not know what I say!'

His head fell upon his hands in an emotion strange and terrible to witness in one whom she had always seen so gay, so self-controlled as Angus. Much moved, she came a little nearer, and tried to speak intelligibly.

'Mr. Campbell, pray, pray do not grieve so; it is such a pain to see you, and a reproach as well—it makes me feel I must have done wrong, I must have been careless, or I should have seen it sooner, and then it would not have come upon you like this. Forgive me.'

'Forgive *you*!' He raised his head, and looked at her once more before it sank again. 'You—an angel of God! There is only one who has done it all—myself! Can I forgive myself? I

have ruined my life. I have lost all hope of happiness for ever.'

'Oh! no,' she answered softly; 'you have loved and been loved, and this happiness will come again. God will give it to you.'

He shook his head. 'Life is over for me,' he answered.

'Oh! no—no. We never do right when we despair like that. All this will pass; let me have this hope, or it would make me too unhappy.'

'Would it? Hope for me then—I cannot for myself. What are all the years before me worth? What have I to live for?'

'All of—us.' The words came out tremblingly, but her voice steadied as she went on. 'All your friends who care for you so truly—all the great gifts that have been given you—all the world whom you can help with them. You will be my brother's friend, and some day, perhaps, you will make me happy, and will look on me as a true friend also.'

He slowly removed his right hand from his face, now bent low upon the table, and for the first time laid it upon one of hers. That silent clasp contained a promise on both sides. In the touch of those slender fingers, which rested for awhile within his before they were withdrawn, there lay a healing influence, a sanctifying power. When at last he raised his head again, it was to find himself alone.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Is it . . . the past will always win
A glory from its being far;
And orb into that perfect star
We saw not, when we walked therein?—TENNYSON.

THE Campbells returned once more to the Hanger, an arrangement that relieved Sir Philip from responsibility as well as from loneliness, as Di's taste could now assist his own in the work of refurnishing rooms which were to be devoted to the especial use of the future mistress of the house. The Oak room was too sacred to be touched, and others had been chosen to be decorated with the utmost that modern art could do—in time, it must be hoped, to be filled also with some part of the charm still clinging to those walls within which the last Lady Merivale's days had been spent. Phil's truest friends could not form a better wish for his future domestic life.

Satisfactory accounts had been received from the Colonel and his bride. Phil appeared to be taking his happiness cheerfully, so far, though it cannot be said that his reports of it equalled the signals of bliss from that enchanted spot in Devonshire whence Harold's and Effie's notes arrived,

breathing rather of Eden and midsummer than the atmosphere of an English January. There was another traveller from whom the home party would have been as glad to hear as from any of the rest. When six days had passed since Charlie had quitted London, on the evening of Harold's wedding-day, and nothing had been received from him beyond one short note announcing his arrival in Paris, Sir Philip began to grow uneasy and to fear—he knew not what.

‘If there is no letter again by the second post this morning,’ he said, as he entered the room already beginning to be called ‘Cecilia’s sitting-room,’ where Di and Dora, with their uncle and Sir Malcolm, were assembled to give opinions on carpets and curtains, ‘I must say it will make me seriously anxious.’

Sir Philip was reminded by his son-in-law of the absolute uncertainty of yachts, and that if Charlie had written just as he joined this one, and the letter had in any way missed, it might yet be a long time before any tidings of him would reach the Hanger. It might be so; but nothing could satisfy Sir Philip. His was the first ear that caught the tread of a servant advancing along the gallery, even before he entered the room, bearing letters.

‘Ah!’ cried the Vicar, ‘now let us see. No, none from Charlie; a foreign one, though, for you, Philip.’

It bore the Paris postmark, and was addressed in a strange writing. Sir Philip's hand actually trembled. He opened it—glanced at the first few lines, and laid it down with a groan. His forebodings had not been groundless. The letter came from an English doctor in Paris, who stated that, having been called in the day before to see an English gentleman at an hotel, he thought it right to let his friends know that he was suffering from an attack of low fever, which had apparently been upon him for some time past. The doctor hoped shortly to subdue it, no complications having at present appeared, yet there was so much prostration that it would be satisfactory if some friend could come out to him at once. He had already procured a nurse. This was the whole of the letter, which Di, taking from her father's hand, read aloud to the rest.

'No message from himself?' said the Vicar hastily.

'None.' They looked in one another's faces. Sir Philip was the first to speak.

'When is the next train up?'

'Two o'clock,' said the Vicar.

'We must be ready. Di, you will order——' He rose from his chair and tried to walk, but trembled all over, and Sir Malcolm caught his arm. They persuaded him to sit down again, assuring him all should be ready, and endeavouring to find words of confidence and hope. Sir Philip did not regard them.

‘You are coming?’ he said, looking round.
‘Who is coming?’

‘Malcolm and I are coming with you, dear father.’

His brother, who had been speaking with Dora, turned at once. ‘So am I, Philip. I am going home now. I shall meet you at the station.’ Without another word he went away.

Di hurried to her room to make preparations, where she was presently followed by Dora, who asked for the doctor’s letter, and sat down to copy it, while Di gave rapid injunctions about her children.

‘They must stay here, of course,’ she said.
‘You will come over and see them?’

‘Yes.’

‘And let me hear of them often?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you will write at once to Effie and Harold?’

‘Yes.’ She rose and returned the letter.

Di shrank back as she took it.

‘Dora—don’t look so deathlike! We must hope—we must hope!’

‘Yes.’

Like a moving image, Dora turned and began to assist the maid now entering the room. When all was ready she followed them into the carriage, and, seated by Sir Philip’s side, took one of his hands within both her own, holding it in total silence until they reached the station. When the

train had arrived and the moment of parting was at hand, she clasped Di in her arms with a sudden start, as though wakening from a dream.

‘You are going,’ she cried passionately, ‘and I—cannot!’ More words were impossible, as Di silently returned the embrace, and in another minute Dora was standing on the platform alone.

They were gone, and she must go back—back to the Grange, to write what she could to Harold, and then to think over the past few hours in lonely silence. Loneliness was all she desired now, and when Miss Goode came hurrying up from the Cottage in sorrow and alarm, she turned away from her in a dull stupor of wretchedness. Neither Miss Goode nor any other person could fully enter into the nature of her grief. Not one of the travellers, now speeding on their way to Paris, could know, as she knew, all the reasons for the prostration in which Charlie was lying. His paleness, his silence, his look of ill-health, even before leaving the Hanger, were recalled by memory now. She had a clue to their source, furnished by his parting words. He had believed she was both loved by and loved another, and she had not been able to undeceive him !

During the last ten days she had pondered much on the past, not without sincere regret, and some self-reproach that she had not been

better able to read its meaning while it had still been the present. Charlie had done so, it appeared, and had perceived those attentions to which she had herself been blind. But how much had she had to blind her of which he knew nothing! On Angus Campbell's side there had been but the same manner, the same air and smile, the very same deference and apparently peculiar interest that she had known and trusted eight years ago—could she forget with what a result? Could such an experience ever be blotted from any woman's memory? On Dora's it had been engraven so deeply that she had spoken the absolute truth in assuring Mr. Campbell that never during the last year had she for one moment supposed him to be attached to her. But since that day the question had risen to her mind, whether she would not have discovered the truth had she herself again been attached by him, and with it the further question, why this result had not taken place. Had it been from distrust born of the past? Had he himself altered, or had her own estimation of men changed? Or was it owing to some cause distinct from any of these, that the old charm had failed and the enchanter's wand been broken? She could not decide; she only knew that so it had been.

Not less had she been occupied with the thought that Charlie had gone away deceived, and that she could see no way in which it would

be possible to undeceive him. No one knew the truth but herself and one other. From him nothing would be learnt, while honour must seal her own lips. Still Charlie would be waiting on, expecting to hear the tidings he dreaded, for instinct told her he intended his absence to be a lengthened one, prolonged on her account. This thought had thrown her mind into a tumult of trouble and perplexity. Certainly she had wished his addresses to cease, but not in this manner; she had desired that he might be cured, never that he should be deceived, least of all that he should so utterly misjudge her own feeling. The misery and despair written on his face as he bade her good-bye were enough to account for a large part of his present condition. What had he not been enduring since they had parted! Alone, hopeless, ill—how ill they knew not! Dora shuddered as she pictured all to herself, and wished with a vain intensity that she had seen and discouraged Angus Campbell's attentions long ago, so that Charlie at least might have been sure no other man had gained the heart which she had twice refused to him.

That love of which she had thought but slightly, esteeming it nothing but a fire of straw, fierce and fading, was costing both him and her very dearly now. Yet ought she to have acted differently? Had not his future welfare been her great object in every answer

she had given him? Had there been anywhere a great, fatal error? Her head ached ceaselessly and her pulses throbbed feverishly as these questions came round and round upon her with obstinate persistency. What might she do to answer them—to break the bonds which held her? Almost she resolved that nothing should keep her from following the others, from kneeling by the sick bed, and whispering the truth to that fevered brain. The next moment she was hiding her face for shame at such a thought. They had left her behind; no one had proposed she should go, not even her uncle—no one had dreamt that her place ought to be among them now. Yet, was Charlie to die for want of hearing that which she alone could tell him, for, at least, might she not assure him that she should never be Angus Campbell's wife? But perhaps, if she were there, he could not hear, he could not see her—all might come too late!

Too late! The anguish which these words held for her as often as they rushed upon her imagination was of a nature she had never known before, not even in her first great sorrow. Then she had grieved for herself—now she despaired for another. If Charlie were indeed to be taken from them, what enduring affliction must descend both upon her home and his, and what unavailing regrets must fill her own sad self-reproachful heart for ever!

CHAPTER XLVII.

So passed the first two days. The third brought the promised letters from Paris. They told her how Charlie had been found, lying unconscious in an *appartement* of an old-fashioned hotel, standing in its own courtyard, in a quiet street. The sick room was shut off from the general passage, so that isolation and comparative silence could be secured. With an enumeration of such local advantages all the comfort of the letters ended. Nothing of the sort could be extracted from the account they gave respecting the patient's condition. Charlie was exceedingly ill; both his uncle and his sister confessed it. He had recognised no one, and lay in a state of weakness which, considering his youth and vigorous frame, both surprised and perplexed the doctor. No change was to be at present expected; it might be many days before a turn came in the fever, which the doctor believed must have been on him for some time before he had been summoned, for, though the patient had taken to his bed only on that same day, delirium was then already setting in.

Dora sat alone with these letters in the fading light of the winter's day. Already she knew every word of them by heart; yet whenever she lifted her half-closed eyes it was but to read again the often-read pages. Suddenly a step crossed the hall without, the door opened, and Harold stood before her. Nothing seemed to surprise her now. She rose and greeted him in silence.

‘Have you heard?’ he asked. She put the letters into his hand. He devoured them, as it seemed, in an instant, re-read them more slowly, then laid them down again.

‘That is all you know?’ he said.

‘All.’

Harold sighed deeply, and for a minute or two kept silence.

‘He has not been looking well lately,’ he said presently. ‘It struck me particularly the very last thing—just as we drove away.’

‘Away! Yes. Oh!—what a coming home for you! Are you alone?’

‘Yes; she wanted to come round, but I could not let her. We got your letter last night, and started for London this morning. She must be there now, and I must go up by the express. The carriage I came up in is waiting to take me back. I wanted her to have some rest before we go on again.’

‘On?—where?’

‘Paris, of course.’

‘Paris? You and Effie!’

‘Of course we must go to him! I have come round here to know what you had heard, and to see you too—poor little girl, left all alone!’

He sat down beside her, and put his arm around her with protecting tenderness.

‘Alone! Yes. And you are going too,’ she sighed, as she turned to lay her head on his shoulder.

‘Come with us, dear,’ he said. ‘Come with Effie and me.’

‘I cannot! They left me here!’

‘But I cannot bear to leave you. It is so lonely for you here. I will wait till you are ready, and go up later. We can cross to-morrow instead of to-night.’

‘I must not go! I promised Uncle John I would see to things here; he could not have gone with them at once if I had not stayed.’

‘But if—,’ began Harold falteringly; then, pressing her closer, ‘I don’t believe,’ he cried, ‘there is anyone in the world Charlie would rather have with him than you!’

‘He might not know me now. It might be too late!’ The words were uttered in a tone that went to Harold’s heart.

‘Don’t, my darling; don’t despair. He will be himself again soon, please God.’

She rested for some moments silently against him. ‘I cannot go,’ she said presently. ‘I have

no right. But you will go. Will you do something for me?’

‘Anything in the world! What is it?’

‘It is—to say something—if you can.’

‘To—him?’

‘Yes.’

She was silent again, and Harold felt how fast her heart was beating against his arm. Presently she spoke, with much difficulty.

‘When he went away—he had made a mistake—about me. I want you to tell him—the truth.’

‘Yes. What must I say?’

‘He thought’—her voice was scarcely audible—‘I was going to marry—some one.’

‘Angus Campbell?’

She bowed her head.

‘And you are not?’

‘Never! Not if he were to ask me a hundred times over!’

A light came into Harold’s eyes. He clenched his disengaged hand. ‘I have been a fool—a fool!’ was his instant inward comment.

‘I will tell him,’ he said after a moment’s pause. ‘So soon as he can hear it I will tell him.’

‘Thank God!’ She raised herself and threw her arms round his neck. ‘Oh! Harry, if he dies without knowing it I think that I must die too.’

Harold's calmness was entirely gone. He could only press her in his arms with broken words of affection. A revelation had come to him, mingled with deepest self-reproach. Never had he been so much moved, so pitiful, so gentle. 'He will not die,' he murmured. 'He cannot die. He is so young and strong. We will bring him back—home—here!'

'If God wills.' She disengaged herself and sat up with folded hands. Her face had changed. 'I can bear it,' she said, 'if he may but live to know the truth!'

Harold bent towards her.

'What more am I to tell him? Is there nothing more, Dora?'

'Only my love—always.'

'Yes.'

He kissed her once more and was gone.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

We watched his breathing through the night,
His breathing soft and slow,
As in his breast the wave of life
Went heaving to and fro.

LITTLE had Effie Vaughan foreseen how sad an experience would break in upon her bridal happiness, nor in how short a time she and Harold would find themselves entering the place which they had both agreed was above all others to be shunned by them now—Paris—forgetful of themselves, forgetful almost of each other, in the overwhelming desire to reach their journey's end and receive the latest tidings of Charlie's state. Happiness at a distance had become absolutely impossible; the first thought of both on receiving Dora's note, enclosing a copy of the doctor's letter, was to start for Paris without an hour's delay. Harold's presence, his wife was sure, must bring comfort to everybody, and where he went she must of course go also.

Whatever comfort could possibly be brought was indeed needed by the heavy hearts of those now keeping watch in the quiet rooms of that hotel's upper floor, within which the object of

their care lay, all unconscious of the watchers beside him. Di and her uncle had had hard work to maintain anything like cheerfulness against her husband's constitutional forebodings and Sir Philip's unusual despair. The poor father would have wished to surround his fever-stricken son with all the doctors and nurses in Paris, and was for ever imploring his companions to think if nothing more could possibly be done. The question was a vain one. It was clear to all that the fever was running, and must continue to run its course, and that skill could do little ; though care might do something in keeping up that supply of strength on which everything must depend at last. The patient's youth and hitherto unbroken health, and, as had always been believed, his vigorous constitution, were causes for hope to which the more sanguine spirits clung with fervour, unwilling to face another side, and to own to themselves or to each other that in the physician's opinion a lack of strength and vital power was the worst symptom in the case before them.

In such an illness the limitation of man's power is strongly defined. A human life lies at the mercy of a pitiless fever as a disabled ship lies at the mercy of a storm ; something may be done to steer her course through it, but to allay the fury of the storm itself human skill is helpless. Many a good ship rides out a fearful tem-

pest, many a strong man rises unharmed from a violent fever ; but woe to the man or to the ship when the hour of trial finds either in an already crippled condition, since in such a case the power of resistance may have been fatally diminished even before the conflict has begun. So Harold Vaughan felt as he stood for the first time by the bed where Charlie lay, and marked the wonderful change that the last fortnight had worked in him. Was it possible that this wasted form was Charlie's ? In his own soldier-life he had witnessed many a scene of suffering, yet nothing had ever pierced his heart so deeply as the sight of the utter prostration, the wandering eye, the helpless hands of the friend whom he had always looked upon as a perfect type of manly strength. He thought of all Charlie had been to himself ; he thought with a yet deeper grief of one, weeping far off, and alone.

Harold did not even now know nor could he divine all the past, but Dora's words had furnished some clue to the altered looks and spirits which, preoccupied though he himself had been, he could not help observing in his friend when they had recently been together in London, nor could he think of this without keen regret for the share his own words must have had in producing Charlie's suffering. That thought was not needed to chain him now in unceasing attendance beside the sick bed. Affection alone, without this

additional incentive, would have made him at any time unwearied in his service, and he was not more unwearied than skilful. To a man's strength he joined a woman's gentleness, and neither Dinor either of the nurses whom the doctor had at once summoned to the case seemed able to manage the patient as he could do.

All the excellence of Harold's nature shone out now. The mournful party felt as though more hope, life, and strength were diffused among them by the mere fact of his presence. He was able to throw light on what had been to all a perplexing question, the probable origin of Charlie's fever. He knew into what regions of wretchedness his search for Grover had led him, and in how unwholesome an atmosphere he had found him at last. So far as an unseen origin can ever be accurately ascertained, there seemed every reason to believe that he had drunk in the deadly poison when in the act of rescuing his fallen foe. Sir Philip heard, and sorely was he tempted to execrate the man who had in his eyes brought nothing but evil upon his house, and to accuse the mysterious Providence that could suffer such a result to follow such a deed; but the Vicar came to his aid with a different interpretation.

'God's hand is here,' he said. 'His thoughts are not as our thoughts. None ever was a loser yet by treading in his Master's steps. If He takes our boy away, it will be to give him a blessing

too high and great to be known in this world. If he is to stay and serve Him here, this illness has been sent to teach him some truth which will make him serve Him better. It is such as he is who are tried and perfected that they may shine as a light before men.'

'You are right, John,' the poor father would answer. 'He is far before us, far before such as I am, but'—the irrepressible cry always came, 'Oh, my God, spare me my son!'

It was more than a fortnight after Harold's arrival when he came one day early in the afternoon according to custom to summon Effie for the one daily walk they took together. By his wish she had never entered the sick room; there was work enough to be done out of it in attending to those who found the days of waiting pass with unutterable heaviness. She was also constantly employed in writing those reports which must be sent even when there is nothing to be said. In this case one striking point was the monotony of the illness, and of the consequent attendance it involved. No sign of recognition had passed from the patient to his nurses. Harold's watchful eyes had detected no moment in which it would have been possible for him to deliver the message which was never for one hour absent from his thoughts. It weighed the more upon his mind because it was his first secret from Effie—a secret that must be kept not for Dora's sake

only, but also for her own. She should not be troubled at such a time as this by learning that hopes for her uncle could never be fulfilled.

Effie was finishing a letter as he entered—
‘To Uncle Angus,’ she said. ‘I have just had such a kind one from him. See, Harry!’

Harold took the note. It contained an earnest entreaty to be told the moment there was any real improvement in the patient. Effie thought her husband kept it a very long time in his hand, as he stood musing in the window.

‘I have not been able to tell him that there is any change as yet,’ she said, sighing; ‘but I have said that the doctors believe a turn must come soon.’

‘Have you told Dora the same?’

‘Yes; it was all I had to tell her. You know how she has entreated to hear the exact truth.’

‘Poor little girl!’ The heartfelt words were uttered too softly to reach even Effie’s ear.

The turn came—and at last more quickly than had been expected. That evening, during Harold’s last hour of attendance, before he should resign his post to another, he saw a change come over the white face upon the pillow. The vacant gaze was gone from the dark eyes which, opening, fell quietly upon him, and when he bent forward, offering the nourishment standing near, it was accepted as though Charlie were now conscious

of what he was doing. What did such an awakening mean? Harold's breath came fast, but he mastered all show of emotion, and took Charlie's hand quietly in his own.

'That will do you good, old fellow,' he said ;
'you will be better now.'

'Have I been ill, Harry?'

It was so wonderful to hear that faint whisper in Charlie's own tones, that Harold's heart seemed to leap into his throat.

'Yes ; you have not been well.'

'I thought not.'

The heavy eyes closed again, as though in utter weakness. Still Harold watched, not daring to speak or stir until Charlie opened his eyes again.

'Who—else?' he whispered.

'Effie is here with me.'

'Not—Dora?'

'No.' With a tremendous effort Harold succeeded in answering calmly. 'Not yet. But she can come if she is wanted. There is nothing to keep her. I was mistaken when I thought she was going to be engaged to Angus Campbell. She is not.'

Charlie's eyes were fixed upon him ; across his colourless face came a faint colour, like the first dawning of the day.

'She told me so herself—for certain,' Harold continued. 'I saw her just before I came here.'

I asked if she had any message for you, and she said, "My love—always."

‘Mine—to her.’

Harold's ear just caught the faintly uttered words as Charlie's eyes closed once more. Before five minutes had passed he was sleeping like a little child.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Love was given,
Encouraged, sanctioned, chiefly for that end
That self might be annulled : her bondage prove
The fetters of a dream, opposed to love.

W. WORDSWORTH.

SUNDAY quiet was brooding over Hurst Grange. It was the hour of morning service. Not a creature seemed to be stirring either in or near the house, the very dogs were absent, when Angus Campbell entered once more through the gate, and paused by the ivy-mantled porch. It was scarcely a month since he had stood there before, though anyone who had seen him then and now might have supposed that a much longer period had passed over his head in the interval. But there was no faltering in the hand that rang the bell, nor in the voice with which he inquired of the maid-servant who answered it whether Miss Vaughan were at church or at home.

‘She is at home, sir. She is ill.’

‘Ill—and alone!’

‘Miss Goode is with her, sir.’

He asked if he could see the latter. The maid showed him into the drawing-room, and he sank into a chair. He would not see her then!

After all these hours of expectation—longing—dread—he would not see her!

‘So best, perhaps,’ he sighed, but it was a sigh of bitter disappointment rather than of relief. He glanced round the room, and closed his eyes in acute pain. What but pain could the sight of that room ever bring to him? It must surely be a strong reason that had induced him to enter it again. It was a strong reason. When Miss Goode, pale, anxious, and with face showing evident signs of tears, entered the room, he started up, and hastened towards her.

‘Have you heard?’ he cried. ‘Have you heard this morning?’

‘No; nothing. Oh! Mr. Campbell—what is it? Not—not——’

‘Good news—most good news! Could I have come to bring any other? I had a telegraphic message last night from Effie. See—here are the words: “Much better—crisis over. The doctors believe him to be out of danger.” I thought you could not know it yet. That is why I have come down.’

‘God bless you!’ Miss Goode melted into silent tears of unspeakable joy. ‘My dear boy! my dear boy!’ she sobbed at last. ‘Oh! what will she say!’

‘I am sorry,’ he said in a low voice, ‘to hear that Miss Vaughan is unwell—perhaps trouble—*anxiety*——’ He stopped.

‘That is it. She has been pining away—it has broken my heart to see her—but, oh!’—and Miss Goode clasped her hands together in another burst of tears and joy—‘you have brought her life to-day!’

He walked away to the window.

‘Are you not going to tell her?’ he asked presently, as he returned and leant against the mantelpiece.

‘She is asleep. Poor child, she has hardly slept for nights past.’

‘They have always been great friends, I imagine,’ he said slowly.

‘Like sister and brother! Ever since we lost dear little Arthur, she has clung to Charlie with the very same affection.’

He looked at her for a moment in silence; a faint smile parted his lips, and with an imperceptible motion of his head he turned away again:

‘Has she been ill long?’ he asked.

Miss Goode was too much overcome with joy not to be open-hearted.

‘Indeed she has—not so ill as to keep her bed, but too ill to sleep or to eat. I have not known what to do. She refused to think of herself—she would not even have herself mentioned in letters to Paris! I sent for Mr. Lister, but he could do nothing; it was the frightful anxiety preying on her mind. If she could only

have spoken of it—but she would wander away alone, or sit for hours silent, sighing—such sighs!’

Sadder they could not have been than the one that was heaved beside her now, but Miss Goode went on, conscious of nothing but her own emotion.

‘Often at night I would hear her pacing up and down her room, but if I entreated her to rest, she would say it was useless—she could not! I never saw her suffer so much, not even when we were waiting for news from the Crimea—and this has gone on so long!’

‘Yes. Three weeks.’

‘Three fearful weeks! Every day we dreaded to open the letters, not knowing what they might bring us. It has been almost as terrible a time to me as to her—and indeed it ought to have been, or I should be the most ungrateful of women. What Charlie has been to me—what he has done for me—no words can tell. I should not be at Hurst at all but for him; the house I live in is his; he gave me my home!’

Angus bowed his head in assent.

‘He has a heart of gold!—so unchanging and constant, so true and kind! Sometimes I have felt that he was going, because he was too good for earth; and I think—I think she has felt the same!’

Again he bowed his head in silence.

‘But God be thanked for His great mercies ! He knows what broken hearts he would have left behind him, and He is sparing him to us still !’

‘Yes. To give happiness and to—receive it.’

The words were spoken with very white lips. The next moment Angus rose.

‘I will leave this paper with the message on it for—her.’

‘Ah ! Thank you a thousand times for bringing it ; and now I had better go back to the schoolroom. She may be waking.’

‘I had not understood that Miss Vaughan was downstairs,’ said he, a rapid flush rising in his cheeks. Was she indeed so near, so very near, and yet would he not see her ?

‘She came down an hour ago, and then she fell asleep, quite worn out ; but she must hear this blessed news the very moment she awakes. She may be awake now.’

Miss Goode rose to leave the room. For a moment Angus stood motionless—then, impelled by an irresistible impulse, followed her across the hall towards the passage he remembered to have trodden on the evening of his first arrival at the Grange. There was a door at the end, leading into that room in which a merry party had been assembled, where the firelight had fallen on a shy, blushing face crowned with brown

golden curls and lighted by star-like eyes. All then had been life, youth, and hope, in his own heart as well as in those of others. Now, if he trod that passage again, it would be like one who goes to mourn above a grave. And yet he trod it—urged on by an imperious grief that must be obeyed at any cost.

Miss Goode had softly opened the door, and was standing beside it as he approached. ‘Asleep still,’ she whispered. ‘We must not disturb her.’

He was about to speak and retreat, but she checked him with a sign for silence. The door was open ; he raised his eyes—and looked.

Dora lay asleep upon the sofa, beneath the long folds of a soft white shawl, her head resting on a pillow against which her hair lay in bright disorder, framing a face whose absolute wanness showed that her old friend’s alarm had not been without foundation. Every curve of the drooping hands and sunken face spoke a weariness, a hopelessness, too intense for words. She looked like a lily, broken by a storm.

Startled by the unexpected sight, Angus gazed—and learnt. Was this the bright vision of long ago—this that Dora whose power his heart had confessed, before whom he had secretly bowed as a queen among women—crowned by nature and by fortune with goodness, beauty, and prosperity? As such he had delighted to think of her when he had hoped to call her his

own—as such he had bitterly remembered her when that hope had been levelled to the dust. Where had that Dora fled?

Great is the power of truth. Taught by the most powerful of all teachers—heart-knowledge—he read the wounded soul in the countenance before him. There was no crown upon the low head now, excepting the crown of suffering. She then had loved and despaired, though with a different despair to his! Angus could not look upon that altered face and doubt the depth of the sorrow that had changed it thus. But its whiteness and weakness touched him more deeply than its brightest beauty had ever availed to do. A noble regret, not for himself, came pouring through his heart, to be followed by a strange tide of joy. The nature that he truly revered and loved had power to affect his own; something of its pure unselfishness was imparted to himself. He rejoiced to know that the broken flower might yet revive, and that his own hand would be the first to lift it up again. Her life should be as it had been, and still more abundant. She had chosen a lot for herself which would set her far away from him, but it would be a high and noble one—better, more fitting, than that which he could have offered her. Had he been worthier of her she would have been his wife long ago. He knew this now; sorrow and a late-learnt humility had torn all veils from

conscience and memory, and the past stood out in simple truth before him. He knew how he had once treated and now for ever lost her. That love for Charlie, which another could still speak of as only sisterly, might, perhaps, always have remained so, if, when he himself had met her again, eighteen months ago, she could have been led to look upon his attentions as sincere. Though this could never be now, though the sentence had gone forth and all hope for himself was over, self and personal emotion passed from him for a time, as he gazed upon the face before him, or took a higher and transfigured form as he felt with throbs of joy that when life and hope had again returned to Dora, that when, in future years, she should look back to this great moment of her life, the thought of him would for ever rise to her mind as the one who had brought her the blessed news. That was something to have lived for, and he bent his head in silent thankfulness, which he would have once deemed it an impossibility to feel. Then—with one long farewell look, he pressed Miss Goode's hand and turned away. He had seen Dora's sorrow—he dared not wait for her joy.

A letter came from Miss Goode two days afterwards, bringing repetitions of thanks and a description of the change that had been already wrought in Dora. A piece of folded paper lay within; it contained these words :

‘I cannot thank you as I ought for your great goodness in coming yesterday. I did not deserve it, I can never forget it. May God bless and reward you.—Always yours most gratefully,

DORA VAUGHAN.’

He smiled sadly. ‘Always a grateful Dora. But not always—Dora Vaughan.’

CHAPTER L.

And will I see his face again,
And will I hear him speak ?
I'm downright dizzy wi' the thought,
In troth, I'm like to greet.

BENEATH a bright sky in the latter days of May the village of Hurst was stirring itself once more. Envious of its own past achievements, it was invoking the aid of Art and Nature to excel them, by producing a work worthy of a still greater occasion than the return of the Captain to his home, for now he was to return again and to bring his bride with him. On a certain day they had promised to be in London, and in two days more at Hurst ; and such a reception as Hurst was to give them should never have been known since Hurst was called a village.

But no one saw the Captain's real arrival when, on the very day after reaching England, he walked alone through the Grange gates and entered his home unannounced and unexpected. So much the more joy for his uncle and Dora, who felt after the moment's surprise that nothing could be more natural and probable than that Harold should come in this manner. He must

return to Grosvenor Square that same afternoon, to reappear the next day in state with Effie by his side, but it was not wonderful that he had been unable to resist a sight of his home and of them in the first twenty-four hours of his return to England after a four months' absence.

So long had he been away, the first part of the time having been spent in Paris; the last by Mediterranean shores, partly with Sir Philip and Charlie, partly in short flights with Effie to complete the suddenly interrupted honeymoon. There was very much to ask and to tell, but to-day Harold said he could not linger long—he must visit the Hanger as well as Hurst, for the Campbells had promised Sir Philip to come down with him to-morrow, and messages must be delivered in consequence. After sitting for a time with his uncle and sister, he asked the latter if she were strong enough now to walk with him across the downs, for it was not many days since Dora herself had come home from the sea breezes on which Mr. Lister had insisted as necessary for a perfect restoration to health and strength.

She answered that she was now as well as ever, and that if she had not been so, the sight of him would have been enough to make her strong directly. Harold did indeed look prosperous. His lameness was nearly gone, and it was delightful to see and hear him as she walked by his side across the sunny downs in the fresh

morning breeze of May, and to feel how entirely his face and voice were in keeping with the happiness of the day. He had nothing to relate but delight and enjoyment in their southern travels, with the crowning satisfaction of seeing Charlie every time they had returned to him more and more recovered to his usual self.

Suddenly Harold paused and looked round him. They were passing a point of the downs from which of late years the red chimneys of the foundry, with their load of smoke, had been visible. The chimneys had vanished now, their smoke would darken the sky no longer, every building about the place had been pulled down, and the ground on which they had stood would soon revert to its former condition of meadow land.

‘That’s a sight,’ cried Harold, ‘that must have done Charlie’s heart good!’

‘He has not seen it yet; it has all been done this spring.’

‘To be sure it has! *Will* do it good, then!’ He laughed, and walked on, rapidly relating the last news of Grover, from Canada, where, on his recovery, he had gone, provided with sufficient means to make a fair start in a new country, while the improvement that had taken place in him before he had left the old one gave some grounds for hope that the good accounts at present received of him might prove to be the

beginning of a better life. 'Especially,' added Harold, 'as he knows by a letter I sent him from Paris the price that was nearly paid for him.'

Dora's eyes fell, and her lips trembled. She had not been able to allude to the time of Charlie's illness. Hitherto Harold had been equally silent, and now he said no more.

They came by the garden gate down the beech walk, and she looked at the Hanger's well-known walls, and the opening flowers that covered them, with wistful, thankful eyes. Doors and windows stood open again now; the old home was wakening from its wintry sleep.

'Let us come this way; I like this way better than any,' said Harry, with a smile, as he turned to the door of the Cedar garden. When he reached it he paused.

'Dora,' he said, 'are you ready?'

He was standing with his hand upon the door, looking at her with a strange earnestness.

'Ready for what?' said she, surprised.

Stranger still, Harold suddenly bent down and kissed her.

'Ready to see a friend. Come!'

He opened the door, and led her in. Beneath the cedar's spreading boughs the little fountain was playing; beyond the wide shadow they cast upon the ground the sunshine fell brightly on plumes of lilac and the laburnums'

dropping gold. Down the steps leading up to the Oak room, someone was advancing to meet her. It was Charlie. She stopped, astonished, as he drew nearer, holding out his hand.

‘Charlie,’ she cried, ‘is it you?’

‘Yes; did he not tell you?’

‘No—never! Harry, why did you not say he was here?’

She turned as she spoke, but the door had closed again, and Harold was gone. They were alone. A vision of she knew not what passed before Dora’s eyes. Charlie was speaking, she believed, but she did not hear the words distinctly. She only heard the fountain playing, and saw the sunshine on the golden flowers.

‘And Harry said that if I came on here straight to see about things, he thought you would come over.’

This was the first sentence she rightly understood.

‘Yes,’ she said, with her eyes still turned away. For how many weary weeks had she longed to know if that face would be changed—yet now that it was beside her she could not even look at it!

‘Have you walked here?’ said he. ‘Are you tired—for you were—not well?’

‘I! Mine was nothing! I am well—but—you—it was you who have been so ill!’

In a sudden impulse she turned and gazed

up in his face. No, he was not changed! He had returned to his former self, his younger, happier self, for his cheeks were glowing, and his eyes serene. He took one hand in his and drew her up the stairs into the Oak room. There they sat down side by side.

‘Are you recovered, Charlie—really?’ she said, still gazing on his face. ‘Are you perfectly well again?’

‘Perfectly well. Better than for a long time past.’

‘Ah! how good!’ She gave a sigh of happiness.

‘And you, Dora? They told me you had been ill—are you quite well now?’

‘Yes, quite well.’

She looked it. He glanced at her for a moment only, as he said, ‘Is Uncle John not coming to-day?’

‘No. Harry did not tell us that you were here, or Uncle John would have come; but cannot you come to Hurst yourself?’

‘I don’t know. I wanted to speak to him—about myself.’

He rose and walked to the window, then back again, and stood a little way off—his eyes now on the ground, now on her.

‘Did Harold tell you about me?’ he asked.

‘He told us how well you are now.’

‘But not what I want to do?’

‘No ; what is it ?’

At that instant she felt as though she had been wrong before. He *was* changed—but it was in expression. There was a calm purpose in his eyes which she had never seen there yet.

‘I am going to take Orders, Dora.’

‘How glad I am !’

So glad, that words would not come at first. ‘How thankful he will be !’ she said presently.

He looked at her inquiringly.

‘Uncle John. His great wish will be granted.’

Charlie was silent.

‘Will it be soon ?’ she asked.

‘Yes, I think so. I had better not delay going.’

‘Where are you going ?’

‘To the North. There is a man there I want to work with.’

‘To read with, do you mean ?’

‘Yes, at first. He takes men in that way to begin, and they get used to parish work as well. Then they are ordained and stay with him as curates.’

‘But you would not do that ?’

‘Yes, I should.’

‘Altogether ?’

‘Altogether.’

‘You are going quite away then ?’

‘Yes—quite away.’

She sat in total silence. He moved again

about the room, walking to a farther window. When he returned Dora had risen and gone to the door by which they had entered ; she was leaning against the doorpost and gazing over the garden below. He waited for a word from her, but nothing came, and he began himself once more.

‘ My father knows my wishes, and has made no objection.’

Silence still.

‘ You think it a good plan, do you not Dora ? ’

‘ I—am sorry—for Uncle John.’

There was something in her voice that made him take one hasty step forward, and then draw back farther than before.

‘ He would not wish me to waste my life,’ he said, more hurriedly, ‘ and if this is the best I can do he would wish it. Life is uncertain. I have learnt that. We must use it when we have it ; we must not waste it in—selfish feelings. We must live for others, and do our work the best way we can, or the end may come, and it may be too late.’

‘ And the best thing you can do,’ she asked in a stifled voice, as she pressed her forehead against the doorpost, ‘ is to go away and—leave—him ? ’

‘ I *must* go,’ he said, half audibly.

‘ Must you ? ’

‘ Yes—I could not stay here. I am not strong enough yet—some day, perhaps ; not yet.’

She turned towards him, a glow all over her face. 'Charlie—Harry told you?'

'Yes.' He was seated before her now, his face bowed on his hands. 'And I understand all you meant by it. I have thought of it too often not to understand. But though *you* feel we might go on living as we once did—like brother and sister, I cannot do it! I can only go away and try to work elsewhere. I shall have strength for it, I will not despair! No one must despair of strength to do his duty.'

'You are sure you will not come to Hurst?'

She had drawn much nearer to him now. In a sudden flash of light across his soul he raised his head and looked at her.

'Nothing will make you?' she whispered. 'Nothing?'

'Dora!'

She stretched out her hands. 'Oh! Charlie—come.'

'Tell me,' he whispered, half an hour afterwards, 'when did you first begin to care—like this?'

She hid her face entirely. 'I don't know. Indeed I don't know! Sometimes I think it was only just lately, but sometimes——'

'Yes? Love—tell me!'

Sometimes I think it must have been all my life long!'

‘ Well, Philip ? ’

‘ Well, John ? ’

The grey-haired brothers’ hands met in a long clasp.

‘ A couple of wiseacres we have been, Philip ! ’

‘ A couple of happy and thankful men we ought to be now, John ! ’

‘ You may say that ! To think that when you were wanting her to marry Phil——’

‘ And when you were dreading her marrying anybody——’

‘ Providence was bringing about under our blind eyes—old owls that we were—the best, most perfect thing in the world, for them, and for us, and for everybody ! ’

‘ Best, indeed—both for Hurst and Hanger ! ’

CHAPTER LI.

As some tall cliff that rears its awful form,
Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm,
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.—GOLDSMITH.

A LARGE party was again collected on the Hanger terrace, on the evening of one of the last days of June. On the next morning the bells of Hurst would ring a wedding peal, and to-day both houses were filled with guests. Among them were all the branches of the family—Phil, with his own bride, appearing for the first time in her future home—the Campbells, the Darrells, Harold and Effie, and even Lady Barrymore—who had seen fit to acquiesce in what she could not prevent, and to grace the occasion with the presence of herself, her husband, and her elder children. All had been drawn towards the terrace by the beauty of the cool evening after a hot day, to watch the sun declining in the west, and to prophesy a brilliant rising in the morning. Only Di walked apart from the others, with a graver face than usual. She was waiting for her husband, who had spent the day in London. He

joined her presently, and the two paced slowly up and down together.

‘You have come alone, I see,’ she said.

‘Yes—alone. What else could you expect?’

‘I supposed that it would be so,’ she answered, ‘but, as you know, he never gave an exact answer.’

‘I was very sure that he would not come.’

Sir Malcolm’s face was sad as he walked by his wife’s side. Even Di’s was soft and subdued.

‘Have you seen him?’ she asked after some time of silence.

‘Yes ; I have seen him.’

‘And how did he seem?’

‘He gave me this to give her.’

Di looked in silence at a beautiful diamond star.

‘It is what I know he hoped she would have been to him,’ said Sir Malcolm at last, ‘the star of his life!’

‘Dear Malcolm, are you sure of it? I cannot bear to see you troubling yourself unless we are very sure that there is a cause.’

‘If you could have seen him when he put this into my hand, and have heard him, when he told me to say that he wished them all happiness, you would never doubt there being a cause again.’

‘Poor Angus!’

Sir Malcolm echoed the words with a long

sigh. 'What a wife she would have made him !' he said.

'Yes—if she had loved him.'

'And she might have done so ! She would—if no one had come between them.'

'Oh ! Malcolm. Is not Charlie your brother too ?'

'Forgive me, my dearest ! I never meant to reproach him. Charlie deserves the very best there is ; but can I forget Angus ? No—what we want is—another Dora.'

'You have often said,' answered Di with half a smile, 'that it was impossible to find one.'

'I know it. How can he ever find one ? But Charlie might well have waited ; he is young—younger than she is.'

'He is—according to the register, but in no other way. He has been a man for some years past ; and she is altogether unchanged. It would have been absurd to say they were unsuited on that account. You know that even Frances could get no one to listen to her when she tried to make it into an objection.'

'I know that there is nothing to make her unsuited to Charlie. But she would have so absolutely satisfied Angus !'

'Whom would she not satisfy ? But marriages should be equal. She has to be suited as well.'

‘And could he not have done it?’

Di paused. ‘He has charming qualities,’ she said, ‘and great abilities. I would say of him, as you say of Charlie, that he deserves—that I wish him—one of the very best. But I do not think the life his wife must lead would have been the life for Dora. She does not love the world, nor the world’s ways. Her heart is here—with Uncle John—with all of us—with the poor people of Hurst, among the scenes and duties of home. She loves her home.’

‘She would have made a home, and would have loved it, and been loved in it, wherever she might have lived.’

Di would say no more. They stood beside the terrace balustrade for a few moments in silence; then she turned towards him.

‘Look, Malcolm!’ she said softly.

Three figures were slowly coming down the broad walk beneath them, hidden for a moment from Malcolm’s sight by the boughs of an overhanging tree. Now they were revealed to him, and he saw Dora, walking between her uncle and Charlie. As they passed below the place where the husband and wife stood, the three faces turned towards them with, as it seemed, a single smile, a single look of heartfelt, unspeakable happiness. Di unconsciously drew nearer to Malcolm, and laid her hand within his arm. His eyes followed the three, as they passed

onward, with a long, intent gaze. Then he sighed, a long and—let us hope—a last sigh.

‘Perhaps, love—after all you may be right! Perhaps it may be the best thing.’

‘It is the only right thing,’ said Di.

THE END.

